

WHAT SHOULD Mrs. A DO ?

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To
JOHN
AND MY FATHER AND MOTHER

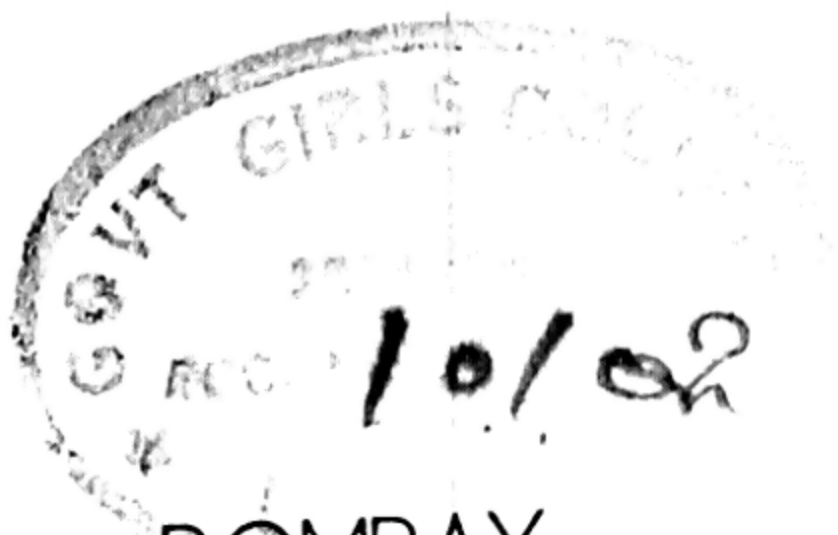
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WHAT SHOULD Mrs. A DO?

By

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WHAT SHOULD MRS. A DO?

READING through some old numbers of ladies journals one is struck by a feature that no longer appears in the same type of magazine today. They are in short, "awkward moments" in a social sense, and the Victorian and Edwardian ladies were asked to give solutions that would cope with them. They have a faint air of unreality about them when read today. It seems incredible that people ever bothered about such trifles. Yet apparently they did and what is more, got a guinea if they knew the answer.

Today when our lives seem a succession of moments to which the word "awkward," if applied would seem a masterpiece of understatement, and when we are faced with the fact that the blast from a bomb may strip us completely naked and leaves us to get home in that plight, we feel that perhaps our grandmothers had no conception how really awkward life could be. Certainly a guinea would be a small enough reward for a good solution to some of the awkward moments war brings into our lives.

But apart from wartime, awkward moments happen to us all. Even the most tactful and diplomatic of people have had to face them, but there is one comforting thing: they seem to happen less frequently when we are older or perhaps it is that they don't matter so much when they do. It is when one is young and especially when one is adolescent that life often seems to be one long succession of awkward moments that leave us feeling that we are shamed and branded for life. Either we do or say the wrong thing, that remembered when we are alone, causes waves of shame to sweep over us as we think of our clumsiness. We

feel we shall never hold up our heads again, yet somehow the moment passes. We find people's memories are short including our own, and until the same thing happens again, we are more or less comfortable.

In Victorian and Edwardian times however, awkward moments seemed to follow people into their adult life. Otherwise, how can those competitions be explained that were such a feature of our grandmother's reading? For each week in some of the journals that catered exclusively for "ladies" there was a poignant cry for help, voiced in the phrase, "What should Mrs. A do"? Poor Mrs. A! Never was any woman so followed by trials and tribulations. If she went out to dinner, foreign bodies appeared in her soup and she was faced with the problem of how to remove them without eating them and yet remain a perfect lady. Or she would cut Mrs. B who had greeted her with a friendly smile before they had been formally introduced only to find later that Mrs. B was the daughter of a lord and a most desirable person to know. Then the pens of our grandmothers went into action and they cudgelled their brains to think of ways in which Mrs. A might yet gain the friendship of a lord's daughter and eradicate the memory of that first icy glare so unfortunately bestowed.

It is significant that these problems of social behaviour were never posed about men. And yet they must have had their awkward moments too. There is the story of a friend's Victorian father who when a young man was out walking by the sea on a hot summer's day. The temptation was too strong, and although without a swimming suit, as the spot was deserted, he went a-swimming. But alas, while in the water, a family party who were having a picnic descended on the beach and planted themselves between our Victorian and his clothes. "And" quote his descendants, "he trod water for two hours before he could come out." Such regard for convention seems to us rather staggering. At the same time there is

something noble in such a manly acceptance of a very awkward situation. No writing to a magazine either to ask what Mr. A should do, and although we may wonder why he did not come out of the water earlier rather than risk pneumonia, still he found his own solution. Sometimes men did come into the problems, but usually as Mr. C and even then, they were only a foil to our Mrs. A who had introduced them to the wrong Miss B.

Nowadays, if Mrs. A has any difficult moments she must deal with them herself for she certainly does not rush into print about them. And as conventions have changed, they are of necessity different from those of her grandmother. How for example should Mrs. A behave when she sees her own evening coat passing her as she stands waiting for her escort to join her in the foyer of a cabaret? A situation that calls for quick thinking and even quicker action with the possibility that if Mrs. A is mistaken, an unpleasant scene may result. In this instance, Mrs. A acted firmly and with decision. Stepping quickly in front of her rapidly moving coat, she said, "My coat, I think?" To which Mrs. B replied, "Oh, is it? I'm sorry." And gave it up. A situation that was intriguing because we shall never know whether Mrs. B knew she had the wrong coat or was just vague about things. But it must be admitted that both ladies acted with poise and grace at a very awkward moment. Some awkward moments have become historic. When Queen Victoria said, "We are not amused" with that rather cold, slightly protuberant blue eye of hers looking at the world, there was a situation that no competition could solve, while the late E. F. Benson tells a story of how two enterprising ladies called on Henry James who although not pleased, gave them tea and afterwards walked them round Rye where he lived. Someone commented to him after that they were not bad looking, and he said, "Yes. I believe, indeed I noticed that there were some traces of bygone beauty on the face of one of the

two poor wantons." Benson, when out to lunch one day, told this story to his hostess who did not appear as amused as he had hoped. After lunch, a friend came up to him and said, "What on earth possessed you to tell that story? Didn't you know she was one of them?"

There was an American book on etiquette published some time ago that had a special section for dealing with socially awkward moments. The reader was advised in such cases to make a small joke and so laugh the matter off. Perhaps in America it may be possible to do this, but most of us have had moments that were impossible to laugh off. At such times an icy paralysis descends on us and any joke we tried to make would sound a bit hollow. For example, a girl I knew was once walking briskly along, swinging her arms, when a little stout man running up from out of a basement café, received one of them full in his stomach with such force that he promptly doubled up. To have tried to have cracked the smallest joke under such circumstances would not only have been ill-advised but positively dangerous. As it was, it took a considerable number of small cooing sounds of sympathy before her apologies were accepted, and rather chastened, she went her way.

Perhaps it is that our national sense of humour has changed with the times. Certainly our standard of values have, for what used to matter terribly to our forbears seems relatively unimportant to us now. Also most women's centre of interest seems to have changed. It is the problem of the nose that whatever is done to it continues to shine like "a good deed in a naughty world" and what to do about "this too, too solid flesh" when it appears in the wrong places that agitates the women of today. It takes an expert to deal with such knotty points, who is kept specially by magazines to write about such delicate matters. We are not as lucky as our grandmothers to whom a prize of one guinea was offered for the best solution when

Mrs. A got into difficulties. However, as the proverb has it, "As one door shuts, another opens" and if only our spelling is good enough and we have the time, we can always try and win a cross-word competition.

THE LITTLE SHOP

IT used to stand at the junction where two streets joined the main road into Holborn, and it always looked as if, much against its will, it had been pushed there by the row of larger shops of which it was the peak. Such a retiring little shop, so small that it was almost with a shock that one realised that it had three small windows and two doors.

True, one had to open one door completely before an entry could be made, and for the other door, I never saw it used except by the tall manager who used to glide in "on lissom printless, clerical toe," after he had been out to his lunch.

The owner, a little man with a shock of dark hair that always stood on end, sold antique jewellery and wrote books, and the shop itself gave one a feeling of lovely surprise. There was the staff in the first place.

First, the tall thin urbane manager, who suggested the diplomatic service rather than salesmanship. Then, another assistant with rosy cheeks and a burly athletic figure who looked like a farmer. And a woman assistant, usually sitting threading beads, who somehow managed to give the whole affair a domestic look. Add the proprietor who looked as if at any moment vine leaves might appear in his hair, the while he piped the whole place into oblivion and a feeling of excitement might be forgiven anybody on entering such a shop!

The place was so crowded with things, and a small counter, that two customers constituted a crowd, while three suggested that the police would have to be called out to keep order! There was a small wooden seat, just inside the door, and if you were a friend of the proprietor's you sat there and read one of his MS. while he dealt with customers. He was a superb salesman. I have seen him talk to one customer, while his manager was dealing with two American women who had been told about his shop, but who didn't quite know what they wanted, and were on the point of leaving, when like a shade, he drifted into the manager's place, and in ten minutes had sold jewels to both of them that they felt they had been looking for all their lives. It was like watching a champion tennis player in action. Such matchless timing, such smoothness, and not one false step!

His jewels were both beautiful and rare, and he always maintained he sold "cheaply to the poor and dearly to the rich". Perhaps that was why he was so successful. But to buy anything from him was an adventure. Suppose it was heavy Victorian silver bracelets you wanted? Down he would dart behind his counter and come up, holding a drawer full. Old heavy gold ornaments the same. Not for this shop velvet lined boxes, but everything in generous profusion. It may have been necessity of course. The shop was so small that there was no room for individual boxes, but the effect was to make one feel a child again. Here were the chests full of gold and jewels one had read about in fairy stories. His counter, too, had the same effect. It had a glass top, and inside could be seen beautiful old rings, earrings, huge lumps of uncut amber, and lovely old paste ornaments. It was like looking in one of those rock pools at the sea-side. One had the same feeling of delighted surprise.

Everywhere was equally crowded. On the walls were old gilt mirrors with sconces for candles, ikons and

strings of uncut turquoises, while a magnificent cut glass candelabra hung from the ceiling. There was a lovely old black and gold lacquer cabinet crushed against the wall, its drawers full to bursting point with jewels. Jades and rose quartz caught the light, and one could not move without touching something of beauty. A magic shop indeed! No wonder one felt its walls must dissolve with the pressure of so much colour and the creative force of the personalities of the men who had used their craftsmanship to give form and beauty to it.

To sit for an hour or two in the little shop was more interesting than watching any film. Anyone in London who had something odd or rare to sell would bring it there, and some of these people were very queer fish indeed. Their entry was always the same. First of all, you would see a head appearing over the curtain that covered the centre of the glass in the door. If there were no customers present, and the proprietor was, the man with something to sell would insert his body very cautiously through as narrow an opening as possible and come in. Then the fun began. The jeweller would look at what had been brought, but always declared it was nothing in his line. Then the article would be handed back with an air of finality to the seller, who undeterred by this, would go on pointing out its unique qualities. There would be a lull. Then the owner would ask casually its price. On hearing it, an expression of pained surprise would spread over his face. Sadly and gently he would point out that he was in business to make a profit and had to sell again. And so the game would go on.

He once invited me to accompany him on a buying expedition. An old fellow dealer had died, and his nephew was selling his stock. But he warned me very sternly about commenting favourably on anything I saw. I must promise to be quite silent. I promised and we set off. Down all kinds of dingy back streets we went, somewhere in the neighbourhood of Covent

Garden, to finally stop in front of some large wooden doors. It might have been the entrance to a stable. There was a small door cut in the big ones, and after we had knocked, I could hear bars being withdrawn, and after names were given, we went inside. I looked in surprise around me. Not a sign of a jewel. Nothing to be seen but what looked to me like a lot of old sugar boxes in some cases piled up high. There was a rough kind of counter, cut and scarred like a workman's bench, and from somewhere, an old wooden stool was brought for me to sit on.

The owner greeted us and asked what we wanted. My jeweller asked to see old gold bracelets and ornaments, and then one of the wooden boxes was lifted on to the counter, tipped up and emptied. I have never seen such a sight! Gold ornaments, studded with jewels of all descriptions piled up. I have never been able to take gold seriously since! How could one, seeing it piled up like oranges in a fruit shop? Then the bargaining began. I amused myself by trying to find out what it was my friend really wanted. First of all, he rapidly chose things from the large pile, and these were all put in a heap and weighed. This lot cost too much, so that it was gone through again and certain pieces eliminated. This happened several times, but each time I noticed there was one small intaglio that was always pushed back very casually into the heap. At last the bargaining was finished, the cheque written out and the seller was preparing to wrap the gold up when my friend stretched out his hand and took the small insignificant intaglio out of the heap.

"I'll put that in my pocket," he said casually.

So we went out, he carrying his jewels in a dirty old piece of brown paper tied with a piece of string, the parcel looking for all the world like the pair of shoes one takes to the little man round the corner to be mended, because he has hard work to make ends meet.

Then he took the intaglio out of his pocket and looked at it lovingly.

"See that?" he asked.

I looked. It was a piece of what looked like milky white agate, mounted in a thin rim of gold, and on it was carved a fish. "I have a customer who collects these" he went on, "and I've been looking for an intaglio like this for him for a long time."

Then he added blissfully, "I shall sell this for as much as I gave for the whole lot."

Another time when I called at the little shop, he was on his way to a private view of a sale. "Would you like to come?" he asked. Then added absently, "It's the sale of Pavlova's things."

Would I like to come? I managed to gasp out that I would, for Pavlova, that rare dancer, had been one of my idols.

Pavlova's house was in Hampstead, and as we went through a green gate into the garden, the sun shone, and her famous swans swam lazily on the pond. Inside the house, my memories are of green and white coolness and a drawing room with long sea green net curtains so that one had the impression that everything was under water. It seemed almost indecent to look at the dancer's possessions. They were such a motley collection. Costly wraps and scarves and beautiful shawls rubbed shoulders with cheap Japanese kimonos in gay colours. Here a pile of orange crockery bought from the sixpenny stores competed with a costly dish. It seemed sad and a little sordid, this unsuitable postscript to the dancer's life whose art had been full of such fine precision.

I wandered through the rooms and stood by an open window, looking out on to the garden. A thrush sang as if his throat would burst with joy. My friend

came and stood beside me and we listened and looked in silence. Then he spoke.

"Pavlova's dead. But a thrush still sings."

And now the little shop has been pulled down so that more road space can be given to those big thundering motor buses. And its treasures have been moved to much more elegant quarters. True, the new shop is more beautiful to look at with its walls and lofty ceiling washed a pale blue, and its handsome glass cases look very wealthy. The staff is unchanged, the manager if anything, looking more diplomatic and urbane than ever against a much more suitable background for him. But I miss the fairy tale atmosphere of the little shop, its cosiness and its feeling of untold riches. Now it is a shop, like any other. Before, it was a child's dream come true.

* * *

"And she opened the door, and there lying before her were heaped up jewels of every description. Heavy gold bracelets, studded with turquoise, great red rubies, large as pigeon's eggs, sapphires deep blue like the sea, while everywhere diamonds twinkled like raindrops."

A LITTLE MUSIC AFTER DINNER

WHAT pictures that phrase conjures up—of an age when life seemed an unchanging and secure thing and when cosiness and comfort reigned supreme. Nowadays, in a world from which dictators have taken both security and comfort, we read about the Victorians and Edwardians with a sense of yearning for a little of that stability, about which they so often grumbled.

We may forget the black side of the picture, a world where servants lived in dark basements and carried coals and hot water up innumerable flights of stairs, for what seems to us now a criminally small wage. A world too, where women had no economic independence and marriage was their only career, to achieve which, if we are to believe what we read about that period, women would do almost anything.

As one step, therefore, to getting a husband, mothers had their daughters taught what were known as "accomplishments". They figured on the prospectuses of the private schools, that provided the only education the Victorian miss knew, as drawing, (with a soft pencil, you could do a lot with trees and a farmhouse,) painting in water colours, for oils were thought to be a little masculine, besides being rather messy, dancing, and a proficiency in some musical instrument.

The harp was considered particularly good as an aid to marriage as a young lady was thought to look so graceful while playing it. Its chief drawback was transporting it, as a harp cannot be just tucked under one's arm in a nonchalant fashion like a roll of music. But apart from that, the mother of a harp-playing daughter must have felt that getting a husband for her, would only be a matter of time and opportunity.

Jane Eyre comments on how handsome Blanche Ingram looked while playing to the saturnine Rochester and how well the harp showed off her rounded white arms, encircled with gold bracelets. Poor Jane, who could only draw a little, felt she had nothing to offer against such a splendid sight. And there is no doubt, if Mr. Rochester had not been such an odd fellow, he might have become the husband of the harp-playing Blanche.

In the eighteenth century, young ladies played or sang as a matter of course. Jane Austen always made

her heroines perform at the piano after dinner. In "Emma", we have Emma Woodehouse regretting so much that her performance was inferior to that of Jane Fairfax, that the morning after the Cole's dinner party, she sits down and practises for half an hour to remedy her deficiencies! Then there was the boring Mary Bennet who once at the piano would not leave it until told by her father to let the other young ladies have a chance to shine. And her charming sister, Elizabeth, who played and fascinated the proud Mr. Darcy, while his rude aunt talked throughout her performance. Also Anne Elliot in "Persuasion" who played country dances while the man she loved danced with the Musgrove girls. And in a later age, the girl Victoria, Queen of England, had music lessons from a Mr. Mendelssohn and drawing lessons from Mr. Lear.

Nowadays, we are rather inclined to smile when we find some of the efforts in the creative line of our great aunts and great grandmothers, tucked away in some old attic. Perhaps the still life of a dish of apples and an empty wine flask does look a little comic, and the legs of Lord Byron, expressed through the medium of woollen embroidery have a distinctly wooden look. But their value lies in the fact that the people who created them were at least doing things themselves, and not sitting back, completely passive, listening to a gramophone or wireless, or watching a film. In the same way, when they were performing in the drawing room after dinner, their efforts from a musical point of view, may not have reached a very high standard, but at least they were trying to do something themselves, instead of having it done for them.

And that perhaps explains to a certain extent why one feels that the Edwardians and Victorians may have been on the whole, happier and more contented than this generation. They were expected to be more creative and were, and although we of a later age may

feel that the things they produced were not worth the doing, any form of creation gives a certain amount of satisfaction to its creator, however poor the result. The creative instinct is one of the strongest in human beings, and when it is unsatisfied, it means the unhappiness of the individual. Who can doubt that if Hitler had become the architect he wished to be in his youth, he would not have been a happier man than he is today? The world might have been an uglier place, it is true, because he might have been a bad architect. But on the other hand, he might never have become a dictator. Or if he had, it would have been a dictator made more human and tolerant from grappling with human nature in the form of contractors! But he failed to enter an art school, and so we have the Hitler of today—an unhappy man and the cause of a great deal of unhappiness to others.

And now war has come and with it the "black out" so that people are compelled to stay at home more than they have ever done before. And perforce, they must amuse themselves instead of having it done for them. So a revival of "a little music after dinner" has begun. Manufacturers say that the sale of pianos has increased with the "black out" and there is no doubt that people are trying to make music themselves, instead of depending on professional artists to do it for them.

There is room in the world for both professional and amateur artists. The former sets a standard for the latter to achieve, and one of the benefits of listening to first-class music on the wireless is that the best music has been brought to the many, instead of remaining the privilege of the few. So that probably there will not be such suffering from bad performances as our grandparents suffered. But at the same time, there is great pleasure to be had from listening to a sweet untrained voice, singing as unpretentiously as a bird does, even if it is a different kind of pleasure to be had from enjoying the technique of the trained artist.

And perhaps it will not be a bad thing if we succeed in regaining a few of the graces of our grandmothers. The present generation of women may have gained in health from their outdoor sports, and have certainly gained mentally from having their economic freedom, but that they have gained in grace or charm is a debatable point. No-one wants women to go back to the old tight-lacing wasp-waisted days when they had no economic freedom. Free women become the mothers of free men. They can keep their games and independence but they might remember that charm, "that bloom on a woman" as the late Sir James Barrie called it, is very valuable in a world that seems to be getting more and more utilitarian. There is a happy mean to be attained, and perhaps an era of "a little music after dinner" may help to adjust the balance.

THE OLD HOUSE

WE went to live there when I was quite small, just before the last war. How well I remember my first view of it, with its old leaded light windows and its sturdy old oak front door. I was with my father and mother and an aunt, and it was getting dusk as we went down the long narrow hall that runs the whole length of the house.

Built in the eighteenth century, it had none of the characteristic elegance of houses of that period; in fact, seen from the outside it had no style at all. It was pleasingly irregular, rather long, with a tall gable at one end, while the middle portion sunk with a suddenness that suggested that the builder suddenly had an idea, but wasn't quite clear what it was.

According to the title deeds, it was built by a curate attached to the local parish church. His Chris-

tian name was George, and he bought one Sarah Thornhill's garden on which to build his house. According to the deeds, the garden was originally quite spacious, but the property had changed hands many times, losing a little ground each time in the process so that when we went to live there, the garden was quite small, although there were still roomy stables.

On part of the garden, a Unitarian Church had been built in later years, and the old house had served as the manse for the minister. At the time when we went to live in it, there was no Unitarian church in the village, and the one time church served as a meeting place for the local Salvation Army. The grown-ups considered this rather a disadvantage, but to us, the beating of the drum that accompanied their services, and the loud shouts that punctuated their prayers were distinctly exciting. There was a small ladder that we unearthed somewhere in the tangled garden, and this we used to place at the side of one of the windows (when there were no grown-ups to see us) then we used to take it in turns to climb up and peep. I don't know what we expected to see, but my own feeling was that anything might happen in a place where a drum was beaten so excitingly and people sang so loudly.

Our curate himself, who built the house was somewhat of a mystery. During his lifetime, everyone thought him a wealthy bachelor, but when he died, he left no money behind him. So that the old house had the legend about it of hidden treasure. To give the legend even greater credence, there was one room entirely panelled in oak from floor to ceiling. It was obvious that the panelling had never been made for the room, for all the panels were of different sizes. The story went that the oak was taken out of the old parish church during repairs and never put back, but used by the curate to beautify his own house. He had taste, even if his honesty was a little doubtful! As children, the story of hidden treasure never palled,

and many a wet day we spent, going round the oak room as we called it, knocking on the panels to see if we could find one that sounded hollow. Alas, we never did, and the curate's treasure, if treasure there was, sleeps peacefully to this day where he left it.

The house itself was a rambling old place with large low rooms, roomy attics and capacious cellars, and it had like most old houses, an atmosphere all its own. The moment you entered it, you felt time did not matter. Even the old grandfather clock seemed to tick sleepily and more slowly than modern clocks do. I should imagine that it had always been lived in by people who had lived happy lives.

William Hazlitt, the essayist, lived there when he was young. His father was minister of the Unitarian church there in 1798, and Hazlitt mentions in his essay on his meeting with Coleridge, how good the leg of Welsh mutton and boiled turnips on which they dined, tasted, the day that Coleridge came to see them. He also mentions the little wainscotted parlour where they sat, the same room where three children of a later age, tapped so excitedly for hidden treasure that so stubbornly remained hidden. It was in that same wainscotted parlour that he painted the portrait of his father, before he realised that his medium was the pen, and not the brush.

There were four fairly large rooms on the ground floor. When we went to live there, the original kitchen was turned into a living room and the whitewash cleaned from the beams and rafters, so that the old oak glowed in all its beauty. One room still has some of the original daub and wattle plaster and a brick floor. Another room had a frieze painted in imitation of the oak fingerstall panelling which ran round the top of the panelled room. This frieze was discovered by accident when the room was being decorated, and cleaned carefully, so that it is as fresh today as when some craftsman of long ago laboured over it so carefully.

When we went to live in the old house first, the oak room was painted a dreadful stone colour, so my mother had it painted cream, and very pleasant it looked. Later when my father bought the house, he had all the paint taken off, and I believe there were no less than sixteen layers of paint between the original oak and the light. But how beautiful the old oak looked when that disfiguring paint was removed! When the sun shone on it, it gleamed almost cherry coloured. We had great excitement, too, when a charming curved recess was discovered that had been boarded up. But there was nothing on its shelves except a few old papers of no interest. The old house was not without its ghost either. Once a visitor came who had lived in the old house when he was a small boy. He told a curious story. He had been left alone by his nurse in his nursery, and on her return, he asked who the lady in grey was who had come into the room when his nurse was downstairs. He was told there was no lady in grey, as he and his nurse were alone in the house, and with that he had to rest content.

Naturally, my mother did not tell this story to us, and when we heard people ask her if she did not feel nervous, living in such a queer old house we used to look at them in surprise. We grew up to take the queer noises that inhabit every old house for granted. But there was a curious sequel to the visitor's story. One day, when I was still at school, I went upstairs to my room to brush my hair. My bedroom was at the top of the staircase and I did not trouble to close the door completely. It was just ajar, I remember. The mirror, before which I stood, faced the door, so that I had my back to it. As I stood brushing my hair, I distinctly heard someone come up the stair and the swish of a dress. So I called out, "Is that you, Mother?" There was no reply, so I waited a second, then walked out of the room, along a landing and looked in the bedrooms. I saw no-one, so I ran downstairs where my mother and father were

sitting reading in the living-room and asked if either of them had just been upstairs. They said they had not left the room since I had gone out, so then I told them about the footsteps and the swish of the dress I had heard. My mother then told me the story of the lady in grey. I remember feeling rather important about it, but since then, other members of the family have often heard footsteps, or at least something that sounds like them. If ghost there is, she is a friendly ghost, I am sure, for there is nothing tragic about the old house.

I am glad I was lucky enough to live in the old house as a child. We had plenty of room to move about and to be alone if we wished. And there was a garden to play in with one splendid old apple-tree, the fruit of which was the best I have ever tasted. And I think, as a child, my first realisation of what beauty meant came one April day, when I saw the apple-tree in full bloom, pink and white against a blue sky with the sun shining. While the old house, with its mellowed roof, hovered protectingly in the background.

THE FRANCE I KNEW

WHAT memories it conjures up! Of Nice at Easter, Provence and the Loire district in the summer, a walking tour in the Vosges Mountains and Paris at as many odd moments as I could accomplish. What a lift of the spirit came as one left the Channel steamer and made for the dining car on the train, there to taste one's first French omelette and to drink coffee! The first time it happened to me I was on my way to Tours with the French mistress from school. She was taking a refresher course there while I was hoping to improve my French accent. I cannot think that I did for the aged spinster who

taught me wanted to talk solely about architecture, a subject about which I knew little. So our lessons used to end in my sitting at the tinkling piano in the small salon and singing "Drink to me only with thine eyes", of which she was passionately fond. She had once taught as a governess in England and I have sometimes wondered if some large Englishman had not touched her heart as he sang it in a manly baritone in the drawing room after dinner. She used to look so very wistful as she beat time to it!

The next spring I went to Nice and as it was out of the season, the whole place was in its shirt sleeves and carpet slippers as it were. We stayed at a small hotel, solely patronised by French people and it was here that I realised for the first time what really good food meant. My education progressed in other ways too, for I learnt to appreciate wine and to realise that it is almost an insult to exquisite food to drink water with it! M'sieu, the proprietor took a fatherly interest in us, but we were a constant puzzle to him. There were two of us, and even with an English uncle and a French aunt in the immediate background, he could not think it was at all the thing that we should be allowed to wander about on our own as we did. So he was always suggesting that we make trips and see the things we ought to see. It was at Nice that we took a journey in a small motor coach that held twelve passengers, all French with the exception of two American ladies and ourselves. We sat in the front with the driver who had a warm and rolling brown eye, and who was most perturbed when he learnt by direct questioning that we were staying at Nice in a hotel, alone. "It was not *comme il faut*" he declared, "for les jeunes filles to be so unattended. And what were our parents thinking about to allow it". On this point we were unable to enlighten him, and his dissatisfaction grew.

He had been a chauffeur to Charlie Chaplin, he said, when he had once been making a film at Nice, and

he described with gusto how he had had to drive a car to the edge of a cliff and stop it suddenly. Then next day, a derelict car was put in the same position, pushed over the cliff, and Viola! And the warm brown eye rolled expressively! At this point one of the French paterfamilias in the back seat leaned over and poking my quiet and inoffensive friend in the back with the point of his umbrella, demanded that she should not talk so much to the driver as the road was *trop dangereux*. "*Trop trop dangereux*", he repeated with urgency. As the poor girl had hardly spoken (there was no need as the driver was practically engaged in a monologue) she naturally felt hurt at the accusation. But the driver airily waved a hand at the enraged passenger and assured him that as a safe driver, there was not his equal anywhere. That afternoon we visited Menton, Cannes and Monte Carlo and it was at Cannes that going into a china shop to buy a particularly pleasant porringer of French pottery that the stout proprietress, "bearded like the pard", said.

"You are English? Yes?"

That was true, we admitted. Eagerly she said, "You know Lord Feetzwilliam, eh?"

We started to explain that the noble lord was not an acquaintance of ours but it was no use. Madame swept us away on a torrent of explanation in which it appeared that when she was younger, she had been a maid in Lord Feetzwilliam's family, and that the lord himself had been used to eat his lordly porridge from just such another porringer as I was now buying. It was truly remarkable, was it not? And Madame beamed at us as she shared her wonder at the incredibility of things.

Another visit to France was the occasion of a walking tour in the Vosges. There were four of us, two brothers and two sisters. The leader of the party was much older than the rest of us, and her brother

had just finished his medical finals. So he brought along a first aid box, the most complete thing of its kind I have ever seen. We never used it once, and for some reason that I have forgotten, it was given to me to carry! We started from Gerardmer and the morning we left, my brother and I with rucksacks on our backs called in at the local bank to get some money. We had already met the bank manager who had lived for some time in England and loved it. When he saw us, he rushed round the counter to arrange my rucksack so that the counter took its weight while I waited for my brother to transact his business. He gazed at my brother reproachfully.

"Your sister? She will not carry that?" and he pointed to the rucksack with distaste.

My brother grinned. After all, I was his sister and having given a fairly good account of myself in the rough and tumble of family life, he felt I could deal with a small thing like a rucksack. "It is impossible" said our French friend agitatedly, giving me an all inclusive lightning glance that took me in from head to foot. "She is too 'fine'".

"Fine" or not, carry the wretched thing I did for nearly three weeks, and once and for all disproved the theory that you don't notice the weight of a rucksack after the first three days. I never stopped noticing mine for it seemed to grow heavier every day! But we had a lovely holiday. And what memories there are of walking through the villages of Alsace and of climbing through pine woods to stay the night at huts used in the winter by members of the winter sport's clubs. At one such hut, I wandered away from the others and went walking. It was in the afternoon and, high up, a lark sang. The ground was covered with shrubs and trees and as I walked, it became rougher. Suddenly I saw, tangled between the trees, rusty barbed wire entanglements, remnants of the last war. The

lark's song, and man's inhumanity to man! I thought of it again when I read that the Germans were again fighting in the Vosges in this present war. But my memories are mostly of eating wild raspberries until we could eat no more, of lighting candles in village churches to St. Christopher, of eating honey and hot rolls for breakfast and of meeting with kindness everywhere. Once we were benighted and arrived at a small village at nearly ten o'clock. Everything had closed down except one small café where the family were enjoying a leisurely gossip. They could not put us up they said, but one of them went with the rest of the party to see if anything could be found, leaving me at the café. I slipped wearily into a chair and let my rucksack drop. "Pauvre petite" said la patronne, "Elle est très fatiguée", I agreed, with fervour, that I was.

"And you do this for a holiday?" she said in wonder? "Incroyable!"

Her family murmured agreement and I began to think myself there was something strange about it. Ultimately as we could find no place to stay, the whole family went into conference, and by some juggling, room was found for us all.

The last prolonged stay I made in France was at Grenoble, in Provence. I was taking a course at the University there and I stayed with a French widow who had a grown up son and daughter. They had never had anyone English staying with them before and were kindness itself. Madame filled me with admiration. So capable and so shrewd and her house was run with the minimum of fuss. Her kitchen was like an operating theatre where no operation ever took place. It was always so spotless and everything when not in use was tucked away so neatly. Madame was filled with curiosity about the English. Was it true that they never drank wine with their meals but only water as a general rule? And was it also a fact that

they considered it rude to talk about the stomach? When I said it was partly true, Madame gazed at me for a moment, then with stark simplicity murmured; "Mon Dieu! Quelle pays!"

And now, I wonder whether I shall ever be able to go to France again? That its people will change to the pattern its conquerors wish to impose I cannot believe. But I am thankful to have known France when she was free and grateful for all she gave me. To be young, wine-warmed and sun-kissed in France, was to have been in Arcady!

ARE YOU GOING TO THE DANCE?

THAT was the question we used to ask each other round about Xmas time. And it was always "The Dance" mark you, not just "A Dance". For that was what it was to us in those far off days between the last great war and this present one. For it was the event of the year in the small country town of Mew and although it was not exactly a Xmas affair, being held on New Year's Eve, it put the seal on the end of our Xmas junketings.

It was always held in the old Assembly rooms and although the inn had kept up with the times by having the old stables turned into garages, the paved yard was as it had been in the old days when Victoria gazed on the world with a rather protuberant blue eye and was hardly amused at anything. Jane Austen herself could have come to The Dance without feeling at all as if she had stepped out of her period, while Mr. Woodehouse would have been suitably horrified at the draughts which blew in, when some reckless young person opened a window in the overheated old rooms which were warmed by an immense iron stove. All of us

who lived in Mew walked to the Assembly Rooms on the great night.. To have done anything else would have seemed pretentious. Even today there is only one hired car to be had in Mew and that is in no sense a taxi, but a dignified saloon which the owner drives himself and which, if you want to hire it, you must arrange with him at least a week ahead so that he can arrange his affairs accordingly. The farmers who drove in from the country round came in horses and traps, or ancient Ford cars, and the latter came in very handily for the young and amorous who wished to have a sitting out place where a certain amount of privacy could be had. But most of us walked with our dancing slippers tucked in the overcoat pockets of our escorts. For we were an unsophisticated lot when we came home to Mew at holiday times. Town ways dropped from us like dead leaves in autumn when we came back among people who could remember us as small children, and who, at the least sign of uppishness, did not hesitate to bring up some story of one's youth that had the effect of reducing one to proper dimensions.

There was a terrific bustle on this one night of the year at the White Horse. Usually the ancient inn looked sleepily at the world for most of its days, except on a market day when there was a certain amount of coming and going among the farmers who used it as a meeting place and stabled their horses and traps there. But to most of us it was a wonder how the proprietor got along from one year's end to another without going bankrupt. He had been an ex-officer in the Great War and was one of the most villainous looking men I have ever seen, in the tradition of the villains of Victorian melodrama. With beetling black brows, a fierce black moustache, and usually dressed in loud checked tweed coats, riding breeches and leggings, it was hard not to look at him and not feel that he ought to be in a museum labelled "The Last of the Villains". Yet never did looks belie any man so much. Apart from a little gossip about an anæmic looking barmaid,

no-one ever uttered a word against him. In fact he was elected a People's Churchwarden and played cricket with the Rector in the village team where he managed to give, even in cricket flannels, a strangely sinister look to our innocent green turf.

On the night of The Dance, he was in high feather. Wearing a dinner jacket and black tie, he was everywhere. Not doing very much but giving the impression that he was. His wife, a prim looking woman who wore her hair after the fashion of the late Queen Alexandra and who was never seen without a black velvet ribbon round her throat, always kept in the background on these occasions, seeing that the extra maids called in on this special night behaved themselves and didn't supply their favourites with extra delicacies!

The inn itself was a funny old Victorian place with rooms that looked amazingly comfortable, if a little overstuffed, but with blazing fires and cosy red curtains seemed all that a country inn should be on a cold winter's night. Certainly when supper-time came, most of the dancers quite openly hurried from the dance floor, along a narrow passage to where supper was laid, for round about midnight, country appetites got keen and not to sit comfortably at a table and satisfy them would have been a major tragedy to most of the dancers. Indeed, our host used to wear a slightly anxious look as time went on and no-one showed any signs of going back to the ball-room. In vain did the band play its loudest. Middle aged men in evening suits of a slightly antique cut which smelt strongly of moth balls, sat stolidly eating plateful after plateful of creamy trifle, well laced with sherry determined to make up any energy they had lost on the dance floor. It was the young and romantic who came to the rescue. Back they would go to where the music called and then the agonised look on the host's face relaxed a little. For there was another supper yet to come, and there must have been many an urgent

message sent out from the kitchen as supplies grew dangerously low.

The Assembly Rooms themselves, looped with swags of greenery reminded you of some elderly lady, a trifle faded who had prinked herself out somewhat desperately with some ancient finery, hoping that she would pass. But they were not without charm and a certain amount of dignity. Our elders would invariably say as we were setting off, "Well, you will have one of the best floors in the country to dance on". Then would follow a flood of reminiscences of the beautiful Miss M, the belle of the district in Victorian days who at one ball failed to appear. Impatient swains waited and equally impatient girl friends speculated on what could be keeping the fascinating one so late. Then on the stroke of midnight, she appeared, wearing a white satin dress, trimmed with real red roses from a wealthy admirer's greenhouse. Such daring originality shook the whole village and had passed down into history! Then there were other tales. Of lovers who had chosen the ball as the occasion to elope,—for Mew had had its adventurous souls who had not hesitated to throw their bonnets over the windmill when love had been too strong for them.

But I remember one dance in the old rooms that could not have been equalled for beauty and mystery by any that had gone before. It was held on the New Year's Eve when the Russian dancer came to Mew. The news had gone round some time before that the son of a man in the village had married a dancer and a Russian one at that. Mew quivered deliciously at the thought. They had heard of Pavlova, it is true, but few of them had seen that incomparable creature. Those of us who had, wondered which one of those sleek black-haired graceful girls who wove such marvellous patterns of beauty in "*Les Sylphides*" it could be.

There was an air of suppressed excitement in the old rooms that night. Some of the people there had

already seen the Russian girl and to tell the truth, were not very impressed. "A tall woman" they said vaguely. "Large and rather pale with dark hair. Very Russian looking". But it was clear that they had expected something more exotic and colourful than a girl who wore a coat and skirt, just like they did themselves.

And then she came. And very wonderfully, she wore a golden dress. Beauty did indeed come among us on that last night of the old year. She stood like some great golden bird in the Old Assembly Rooms with her sleek black head that shone like a bird's wing, her magnificent body clad in gold and those great dark eyes in the pale oval of her face. As she walked down the room it was like watching the wind ripple through a field of corn. Something happened to all of us who were there that night. Everything grew brighter and the violins played with a haunting sweetness and drifted into playing old waltzes that I swear before that night they had almost forgotten. And that great golden bird of a woman danced with such grace and loveliness that you caught your breath with the loveliness of it all. She should have made the old rooms and the dancers in them, a little tawdry and cheap. Actually, like the sun, she made everything look brighter than it was. There was an air of happiness about everyone and her beauty spread itself about us like the sun does its warmth. We were all a little dazed with the glamour of it all, and to the young among us, it was a very memorable night.

And now I hear that our villainous looking host has died and his prim looking widow has retired most appropriately to Tonbridge Wells. And no-one dances any more in the Assembly Rooms. The boys and girls of today dance in the ugly modern Town Hall which is larger and more convenient. The cobwebs will hang in the old powdering closet where we used to retire to be put to rights by the old village dressmaker who had made us our first party frocks and whose familiar

fat black pincushion was always placed discreetly near a tray where you could leave sixpence if you liked. One is apt to get reminiscent at Xmas time when there is a war on and living in a foreign land nostalgia for old familiar things grips one. Yet I think if I were to return again to Mew and someone asked me "Are you going to the dance"? I should immediately feel that sense of excited anticipation that I used to when I was still in the painful stage of growing up. But alas, the Assembly Rooms are now given up to ghosts of a world and a way of life that will never come to most of us again. Dear ghosts! May you circle round the old rooms to your bygone tunes in peace!

THOSE DANCING YEARS

DANCING is one of man's most primitive forms of showing emotion. As the superior Mr. D'Arcy assured Sir William Lucas in "Pride and Prejudice", "Every savage can dance", and although the ordinary man no longer dances when the spring crops are sown, or indulges in mating dances when he wishes to choose a wife, yet he still dances when he wishes to be festive and gay.

It is only in modern times that dancing has become the emasculated thing as we know it today. Primitive dancing was full of virility and was usually performed by men only. Even our Victorian grandfathers put a lot of spirit into their lively polkas, mazurkas and quadrilles. Indeed a Victorian "buck" when he went to a ball, often took at least three spare collars with him, so that as one wilted through his lively hoppings he could change it. The "Three Bottle" man of the eighteenth century had changed to the "Three Collar" man of the nineteenth!

The polka appears to have been one of the most punishing dances for as a song of the period goes,

“See me dance the polka,
See me cover the ground,
See my coat tails flying,
As I whizz my partner round”.

How the Victorian ladies stood up to this “whizzing” in their stiff, high whalebone stays, laced so tightly, is a mystery to their more languid descendants. But apparently they did, and liked it, tight stays and all. It was with the introduction of the waltz that the tempo of dancing slowed down a little, and it seems queer these days to think that when it was first introduced this dance was considered a little improper. Why, it is difficult to see. For a man held his partner at arm’s length and wore gloves, while the ladies were practically armour plated in their stays and crinolines. Perhaps it was the enticing rhythm of the waltz that might be thought to “Put thoughts into people’s heads” for the Victorians to a man were strongly against anything like that. Especially if the heads were young ones!

However, dancing became more and more languid. Waltzes became slower and the jollier dances like the Lancers and Quadrilles became fewer and fewer on dance programmes. It was in Edwardian times that the influence of America began to show itself in dancing and dances of negro origin like the “Cake Walk” although not danced by polite society were danced by the crowds of people who began to take their holidays at the big seaside towns.

With the war of 1914, there began a perfect craze for dancing. Soldiers home on leave, fresh from the monotony and filth of trench life wanted to forget the horror of war as quickly as possible. And dancing was one way to do it. Dance bands sprang up everywhere and famous restaurants laid down dance floors in their

sacred dining rooms so that their clients could dance in between the courses of their meal. People danced at tea, at dinner and at supper to the strains of negroid music that came from America with its tom-tom like hypnotic rhythm. And the wail of the saxophone rose and fell over a dancing world.

There was a strongly sexual element in dancing at this time. Men held their partners as closely as possible and danced cheek to cheek, and a fact of social significance this, all classes danced the same dances. Even the old danced. Stout old gentlemen, glassy eyed and tense, and equally plump elderly ladies rotated solemnly on dance floors and felt they were young again. A dance hall at this time presented a curious sight to an onlooker. Scores of solemn faced people, joylessly shuffling their feet along, apparently locked in a close embrace, met the eye. For the amazing thing about this modern dancing was that although people enjoyed doing it, it was not a joyous thing to watch.

The favourite dances at this time were foxtrots, blues, and the exotic tango while fantastically ugly dances like the "Charleston" and the "Black Bottom" both Negroid in inspiration had their day; then passed into the dustbin of men's minds. Professional dancers who introduced and taught these new dances and dance bands who played the music for them were paid huge salaries while a new profession arose, that of the professional dancing partner.

When the war finished in 1918, the dancing craze rose to even greater heights in the immediate years that followed. The younger generation who had passed their adolescence during the war years, felt that they had been cheated of their normal life and snatched like greedy children at anything that would give them pleasure. While returned soldiers wanted to forget what they had suffered. So they danced and danced. Then as the war years receded, a rapidly sobering world engaged in post-war adjustment found that they

had to think more and dance less. With the rise of Hitler on the Continent, the dancing years were over.

Not that people stopped dancing altogether. But dancing lost that feverish hectic quality that had characterised it when the craze was at its height. The dances too, had changed in character. Just before this last war, people were dancing "The Lambeth Walk", "The Chestnut Tree", and the "Palais Glide", all dances that were communal in character and in which miming as well as dancing had a part. The dancers slapped their knees or their partners' hands and danced a few steps individually almost as in folk dancing. In the "Palais Glide" any number with arms interlaced could dance together, doing the same steps. It was almost as if in those last few uneasy years before the war came the community sensed the coming upheaval, and even in its dancing, began to draw together as a herd does in time of danger.

For dancing mirrors an age—like any other activity of a community. The lively dancing of the Victorians was a reaction from the ordered pattern of life that prevailed then while the dancing of the war and post-war years reflected the breakdown of the conventions that war had brought about. Men's more primitive impulses had been released and they expressed it by dancing the dances of the Negroes, the one race in modern times that has still kept its unsophisticated emotional response to living.

Now, one cannot help speculating how the world will react after this present war when peace comes. For after any great war in the past there has always been a time of hectic gaiety. And dancing has expressed it. Shall we have a dance-mad generation after this present upheaval? It is only natural that we shall rejoice when peace comes, but this present generation has already had one war in its childhood and another in its maturity. And there are signs that it is making them think. Bread and circuses may not satisfy them when peace comes as they have satisfied former generations.

THE RIGHT KIND OF AUNT

TO be an aunt nowadays does not mean much when one is hailed by that title by every small child one knows. But to a previous generation to be an aunt usually implied blood relationship with its family responsibilities, and those of an aunt, especially if she were unmarried, were sometimes fairly heavy. For it was she who in cases of sickness was called in to share the nursing, and it was to her that small nephews and nieces were sent to spend their holidays when their parents wanted a rest from them. For it seemed to be accepted that if you were not chosen to be a wife and mother, the career of aunt was the only one left to you. If you had a little money of your own, it was not so bad, but if you were dependent on a married brother or sister for a home, or were the unmarried daughter whose duty it was to live with your ageing parents, the position had its drawbacks.

But modern days have seen the revolt of the aunts. Now, when they are unmarried, they often have a profession, a flat of their own, and short-haired and trim, live their own lives. So much so, that they are often a source of envy to their married sisters, tied down by domesticity and children. No longer can the children be sent to Aunt Selina for their holidays. Aunt Selina is often having the time of her life on a cruise, or abroad with another unmarried friend is seeing the sights somewhere. She remembers her nephews and nieces at Christmas time and on their birthdays, but for the rest considers they are their parent's affair.

Modern children are the losers by this state of affairs for the right kind of aunt to previous generations of children shed a glamour over life. It was she who produced sixpences at unofficial moments and who was often the potential source of the unexpected which

adds so much to the joy of childhood. With parents, life is always more or less a matter of routine to most children, but aunts never seemed to be bound by the same laws. They could prove unexpected champions if one had transgressed and were always possessors of unlimited supplies of cake to comfort one in times of trouble. True, all aunts were not like this. There were plenty of awkward ones who were no comfort to anyone, but on the whole, they were perhaps fewer than the kind ones.

I should have liked to have had Jane Austen for an aunt, for according to her nephews and nieces, Aunt Jane was great fun. How she would have entered into a racy discussion of one's partners after "a little hop". And how interested she and Aunt Cassandra would have been in one's party dress, probably finding something from their own store to add a finishing touch! Yet Jane does not deal kindly with aunts in her books. There is the intolerable Mrs. Norris who in "Mansfield Park" made Fanny Price's life a burden to her, and the garrulous Miss Bates in "Emma" who worried poor Jane Fairfax so. But to counterbalance these, there is Mrs. Gardiner, the charming aunt of Elizabeth and Jane Bennet in "Pride and Prejudice".

My own experience of aunts is not large, as I had but one "Official" one. Of her my memories are on the whole kindly, but not enthusiastic. For she had what every child dreads, a "critical" eye and the memory of that has lingered longer than her pleasanter qualities. But as the giver of unexpected sixpences, she was certainly the right kind of aunt.

But the real joy of my life was my relationship with three unmarried "courtesy" aunts. I have never met anyone who understood children better. Kindly, unjudging, they accepted you and loved you as you were. Laughed at your small jokes and if your hands and knees were dirty, took it as a matter of course and beyond indicating gently that a wash would do you

good before you appeared at meals, left you alone. They lived with a widowed father, an old gentleman with a beautiful white silky beard who was an important person at the local Wesleyan chapel, and although on Sundays to my childish eyes he appeared like God himself, so white his hair and beard, so spotless his linen, yet he became surprisingly human when once the chapel was left and he presided over the luncheon table, where he carved and cracked small jokes that seemed the very quintessence of humour to his small listener.

Staying with these "courtesy" aunts was pure bliss. If you wanted to make clothes for your doll one of them could always be relied upon to produce a bag of enchanting scraps of material. And it didn't matter if you made a mess while the creative urge was upon you. As long as you picked up your bits and pieces afterwards, no-one commented on the fact that you had managed to make the room look as if there had been a miniature snowstorm in it. And if you went for a long walk with them, there was always a chocolate produced at the psychological moment when little legs were beginning to feel tired and home felt a long way off.

They never seemed to find you in the way. If they were dressing you were always a welcome visitor. And what a fascinating process it was watching them arrange their hair and putting on their dresses. Besides which, you were always free to explore their jewel cases or some fascinating old box full of charms and chatelaines that had belonged to some bygone relative of theirs. And on wet Sunday afternoons there were old family photograph albums to look through and always an aunt to say who was who and with stories about incredibly whiskered grandfathers and voluminous skirted grandmothers.

Oh, they were the perfect aunts! There was always something to be done when you stayed at their house and they were always interested in what you were doing. It was so easy to be good when you stayed

at their house that you blossomed like a rose in an atmosphere of appreciation and goodwill.

And now I am a courtesy aunt myself and with their example before me, I ought to make a good one. At least I know the qualities the right kind of aunt should have. She should be kindly and unjudging and above all, understanding. She should produce the unexpected gift occasionally and it doesn't matter how small a thing it is. She should have a sense of fun and be able to play and she should realise that when a small nephew or niece has been naughty, they are supremely miserable until they have been taken back into favour. She should never talk down to the children who call her aunt but treat them as equals. And when they grow older, they should find in her someone to whom they can talk about their difficulties. She should never criticise parents to her nephews and nieces whatever she may think privately, but if possible smooth tactfully any friction between them.

Every family needs an aunt who possesses these qualifications and at one time most families had one. But nowadays with everybody being an aunt, it ends in no-one taking her duties seriously. Why, they have even commercialised the whole business, for before the war, there was an organisation calling itself "Universal Aunts" who were prepared for a fee to do all the things the right kind of aunt took in her stride. I wonder that the ghosts of kindly aunts have not risen and haunted the organisers!

THE STROLLING PLAYERS

THEY used to come, between forty and fifty years ago, to a little country town that lies under the shadow of the Welsh hills and their coming was a great event in the lives of our fathers and grand-

fathers. For the town, even today, lies off the beaten track and has changed but little since the days when Clive, as a boy went to Market Drayton Grammar School, six miles away.

So when the word went round, "The the-aater is here", the tempo of the life in the whole district quickened, for amusements in the country were rare, and the nearest market town was ten miles away, and only to be visited on very special occasions. Besides, there was a touch of glamour about actors and actresses to the hard-working country people. To them, they were "players" as opposed to gentry and working people, and like Columbus they were inclined to feel, "things unknown, chart dangerous". Not that the strolling players were anything but decent and hard-working. In fact when the owner of the show led his company to the local church on the first Sunday of his arrival, wearing the silk hat and frock coat of Victorian respectability it was remarked that he looked "quite the gentleman". The same coat and hat it may be mentioned often figured on the stage on a week-day. This almost state visit to the church, by the way, was a delicate recognition of the fact that on the play bills was printed, "Under the distinguished patronage of the Rector".

The theatre was a large canvas tent and the first few days after the company's arrival were spent in putting it up and getting ready for the performances. The men of the company did this while the owner dressed in a fawn frock coat and wearing a slightly larger than ordinary felt hat with a curly brim, visited the various shops and arranged for them to show his play bills, a favour that was rewarded by free tickets for a performance. While this was going on, the small boys of the neighbourhood could not be dragged away from the scene of so much excitement as the putting up of the tent entailed. It was placed on a piece of waste ground behind the White Lion Inn, and what

with an inn and a theatre, many of the stricter parents felt that their young were indeed in danger! Besides which, it was bad for discipline, for sharp young eyes would come home with stories of how they had seen Pillars of Non-conformity entering the inn by the back way, stout temperance advocates at that, too! So many a small boy went supperless to bed, his small back tingling for seeing too much, and what was worse, mentioning it! But in spite of this, what a magic time it was for the young, for some of the players lived in gaily painted caravans and even to see one of them come to the door and throw out a bucket of water was an adventure.

Then the great night came when the show opened, and the towns-people dressed in their second best (their best was kept for Sundays only) and the people from the outlying villages flocked to see it. A different play was given every night, and often a farce as well. This last was a knockabout sort of business with a policeman with a red nose and yards of sausages and a funny man and the audience enjoyed it tremendously. Shakespeare's plays were often given and were very popular. This may seem surprising nowadays but after all, Shakespeare wrote his plays for just such players and just such an audience. And they were acted as Shakespeare is meant to be acted, with directness and vigour, so that their comedy and tragedy came to the audience as freshly as they did to the Elizabethans. "Hamlet, or the Gloomy Dane" (as it was billed) to the country people was clearly understandable. Here was a man who didn't like his mother marrying again, and for their part they could sympathise. Obviously, she hadn't behaved as she should and she deserved what she got. And so they watched the tragedy, deeply interested, their sympathy with Hamlet, their minds completely occupied with the story and untroubled by theories about Hamlet's psychology. Surely one of the best ways of enjoying Shakespeare? The owner of the show who enjoyed the name of Horace Holloway,

naturally took most of the chief parts himself while his wife was always the heroine. When she was young, although not one of the best actresses in the company, she did very well, for she was not uncomely. But alas, as she grew older, she became fat and even the least critical in a country audience felt that when she acted in tragedy, it was a mistake, to put it mildly. For fat and tragedy do not go well together. And so in later visits when she played Josephine to her husband's Napoleon in "A Royal Divorce" and he cried, "Josephine! Oh Josephine"! as he cast her off, and she lay in an abandonment of grief like a small mountain on the stage, titters instead of the hush that should greet tragedy rose from the audience. At which the enraged artist sat up, glared balefully at the public, then lay down again, and the scene continued! She did not give in easily, however, and continued to play the young heroine long after she should have known better.

Besides Shakespeare's plays (and how the house cheered when Horace strode about, crying "A horse! A horse! A kingdom for me horse!") the company used to play, "East Lynne", "Two Little Drummer Boys", "Lured to Ruin", and of course that stirring melodrama, "Maria Martin, or the Murder in the Red Barn". This full-blooded drama was always assured of a packed house, and when Maria made her eloquent appeal to the cold-hearted villain, "William Corder, will you make an honest woman of me"? he was hissed loudly when he refused. And when, having lured his intended victim to the Red Barn, what a Homeric struggle Maria put up for her life! She picked up the spade that William had used to dig her grave there, and gave him one or two really nasty cracks with it before she allowed herself to be "done in", while the audience cheered her to the echo. Then when the hand of relentless justice tracked down the guilty William (wearing a silk hat and opera cloak when arrested) what a hush when the gallows appeared and in full view of the audience, the villain dropped to his death! Raw

meat perhaps, and not food for babes but it had the quality of life about it. For deceived maidens were not unknown to a country audience, neither were deceivers who refused to take responsibility for their sins. So an unsophisticated audience shed a tear or two over the distress of Maria's aged parents, while thinking perhaps that "Maria had ought to have known better".

The villain of the piece was nearly always the same actor, and in his time had been a good one. But drink had been his "r-u-i-n" and the strolling players his last chance. But what sinister emphasis he could give to a large checked coat and a bowler hat! And how he could twirl a black moustache and raise beetling black eyebrows so that even the most guileless in the audience knew as he swayed backwards and forwards in an ecstasy of amorous passion, (eyebrows and moustaches working overtime) saying, "Kitty-a-I-a love you-a", that the innocent heroine would rue it if she believed him!

The ladies of the company were no longer in their first youth, but they must have been a gallant hard-working lot. To the little country town, they brought a touch of the exotic with their "make-up" in an age when rouge and powder were considered arts of the "Evil One". Even meeting them in the local butcher's and grocer's shop did not quite do away with the illusion that they were slightly "different".

Poor strolling players. Their's was a hard life, full of uncertainty and poverty. Sometimes they overstayed their welcome and had to leave hurriedly, leaving debts behind them. But they always returned at intervals until the cinema sounded their death-knell. But their's was a living art, and demanded a response from their audience who did not just sit back as they do when watching a film. The plays they acted may seem poor stuff to us today, but at least they had gusto, a quality that seems to be dying out of modern

life. And one important thing, Shakespeare was brought into the lives of ordinary people. Perhaps there will be a reaction against negation of living and we shall have strolling players with us again. I hope so. I should like to see Maria Martin hit William Corder with the spade! It suggests gusto in dying as well as living and has a quality of commonsense about it that is most refreshing in these days.

"WHAT CAN I GET FOR YOU, PLEASE"?

THERE must be few of us who when we were very young did not long to have a sweet shop of our own. Or at least to be related to someone who owned a shop. And of course a sweet shop in particular. What bliss, one felt it must be to dive down into a box or jar of sweets and bring them up a handful at a time. Then there was the added joy of taking a crisp paper bag and filling it, to be followed by the final fascination of placing the bag on the scale and adjusting the weight. Meanwhile your customer followed your movements with interest, and if young, with anxiety, for the adding or subtraction of a sweet could make all the difference to one's feelings. No life, one felt as a child, could hold such richness as that of being a seller of sweets. Not only had you power to dispense happiness or the reverse. The freedom to pop a sweet in your mouth whenever you felt inclined placed you above kings.

And there was such colour in a sweet shop. Those portly glass jars filled to the brim with fat brown humbugs, sticks of rock and sweets that were all the colours of the rainbow. And those large boxes of chocolates with what you considered incredibly lovely girl's faces painted on them that were ranged in glass

cases or on shelves behind the counter! Why, you admired them with the same genuine pleasure as Gauguin or Picasso gave you later. Strange to think that there would come a time when you would talk scornfully of "the chocolate box type of prettiness". Your imagination never got as far as the inside of these charming boxes. It boggled at the thought of the rich succulence they might contain. You were not even envious. A single penny or two pence filled your world and what you could buy with it on those far-off Saturday afternoons of early childhood.

Not only were all sweets good to look at, but they had equally appetising names. I don't know what children eat now, but in the small country village where I lived as a child, we revelled in sweetmeats that gloried in names like Almond Kisses, Sweet lips Cachous, Lemon Kali, Rich Cream Toffee, Aniseed Balls, Granny's Mints and scores of other delightful sounding names. And they were as exotic in colouring as tropical parrots. It was regrettable one felt that one's parents had a prejudice in favour of plain chocolate and recommended it on every occasion. By experience I discovered that if you did not buy it the parents did. So that one scored in buying the more adventurous looking sweets, because you were bound to get a piece of chocolate when your own small packet was finished. There was also a liquorice confection called "Spanish Juice" that was frowned upon by the grown-ups but which we found very satisfying. In sticks it was particularly juicy, but in strap-like form it was not so good. It could be bought in thin strips like bootlaces and if I remember rightly you got eight of these for a penny. Their drawback was that you had to put a lot in your mouth at once to get the flavour but even so, you could make it last a long time. Then there were pear drops which left a scent all over the house after you had sucked them and acid drops that one's father recommended. A penny went a very little way among all these and choice was a lengthy affair.

In my own village, the sweet shop that we all patronised was kept by a family consisting of an ancient grandmother with a beard, her daughter and several grandchildren, who as they grew old enough took their places behind the counter. Buying one's sweets there was a complicated business, because young as one was, it soon became clear that the shop was better avoided if the grandmother was behind the counter. For the old lady may have been just but she certainly was not generous. The scale hovered tentatively in the air when she was in action, and then slowly, slowly descended, hardly touching the wooden base before it was back in the air again. But the old grandmother was a practised hand and would whip your packet off the scale and hand it to you in a trice. Sadly you felt its contents as you went out of the shop. Not very many sweets today, you thought, your spirits drooping. Her daughter was not very much better, but she would at least add another sweet when the scales hovered doubtfully. It was the eldest granddaughter we all waited for. What a girl! With generous hand she would fill the packet and as the scale went down with a full blooded bump, she would take it off, give the bag a twist and you would give up your penny and be off out of the shop feeling you were at least three or four sweets better off than if any of the others had served you. How we used to peep into the shop to see if the granddaughter was there before going inside and if she were alone, how one's spirits rose. For it was a sad fact that if her mother was in the shop, she had to moderate her generosity somewhat.

Even in schooldays, a shop still seemed an enviable place in which to pass one's days. Clothes shops were the favourite at this time. Life seemed so easy there, compared with the harassment that was yours. You looked enviously at the girls behind the counter when you went to buy your hair-ribbons and gloves out of your none too plentiful pocket money. No bothering with homework for them, no wondering whether they

would get through "matric". There they stood behind their counter having fascinating conversations with each other and bits about what "he said" and "I said" drifted across to your receptive ears. It all seemed so much more exciting than your struggles with the French Subjunctive and the Science Mistress whose views on things seemed to differ so markedly from yours. You thought of the last piece of work that had been returned and felt your parents were making the mistake of their lives in not letting you be a shopgirl.

Later on, of course one's views about being in a shop changed. It no longer seemed such an idyllic way of spending one's days. Even so, there is still one kind of shop I should not mind keeping and that is the village shop in a place rather off the beaten track. I know such a one in a small Essex village kept by a comely widow. She will supply you with everything in normal times and cash your cheques for you into the bargain. And when her garden is gay with chrysanthemums and you have not any, she will step out of her small emporium and cut you a bunch with the greatest pleasure. You catch a glimpse of her cosy parlour as you stand at the counter and you cannot help thinking what a pleasant combination it, and the comely widow make. No wonder gossip says she has had a lot of offers of marriage. It would be surprising if she didn't. On a Friday evening when all the farm hands have been paid their wages her shop is the meeting place for all the village. If you are a newcomer, all the village ladies will insist that you are served first so that they can exchange news about you after you have left. But it is all done in the kindest way for as a newcomer, you are distinctly "news".

But now in this topsy turvy world that the war has made for us, it cannot be much fun being a shopkeeper. For you have but little to sell and apart from rationed food, everyone is being discouraged from buying the few things that are unrationed. Napoleon's jeer at

us for being a nation of shopkeepers loses its point these days. From what we can hear from England no longer does the shopkeeper ask "What can I get for you please"? in time honoured fashion. It is the customer who tentatively asks, "Can you please let me have this or that"? The shopkeeper must have gone back to the almost god-like eminence of our childish days.

There is one good thing about such a state of affairs and that is that both young and old must be having it brought home to them that money in itself is of no value at all. How can it be when you are a child and have sixpence to spend and find that you are not allowed to buy the sweets you want because there are not enough to go round? To be able to spend and not to be allowed to do it must bring home with a vengeance what the economists have been trying to teach us for years. That money is a utility only, just like the buttons on our clothes and that where we have been going wrong is in regarding it as an absolute standard of value in itself. If only the young learn this lesson early enough, it should make for a better post-war world. A generation of embryo J. M. Keynes is a heartening thought even though they are having to make do with cod liver oil and blackcurrant juice to enable them to achieve his knowledge of economics instead of the lollipops that their elders had!

A BOX OF VICTORIAN VALENTINES

IT had been bought at a country sale as one of a mixed lot of oddments set out on an old black Japanned tray and was of black papier mâché, gay with painted flowers and inlaid with mother of pearl. Inside it was full of dainty Valentines, gay trifles of

another age that ardent swains had sent to their sweet-hearts on some far-off February 14. They lay there in their white and silver lace, some with fat Cupids hovering in a bright blue sky, others decorated with birds and flowers, mementoes of a time when courtship moved to the stately measure of a minuet and the whole of life was unhurried and leisurely. But feelings were just as strong as in a more informal age, and although the convention of the time dictated a more formal expression than we use today, a lover on St. Valentine's Day could send his love a pretty Valentine containing a poem that left her in no doubt as to his feelings for her.

Nowadays, the custom of sending Valentines on February 14 has practically disappeared. Lately there has been an attempt made to revive it but it has not been very successful. It is a pity, for it was a charming custom and added somewhat to the grace of life. There is a tendency these days to try and rationalise love and to minimise its emotional significance, but poetry and romance will creep in even with the most matter-of-fact people when they are in love. Any poetry that is in the dullest of us flowers at such a time and Valentines were one way of expressing it in a less self-conscious age than the present.

In England St. Valentine's Day was thought by country people to be the day on which birds chose their mates. There is a poem by Sir Henry Wotton called "A May Day" in which the lines occur . . .

"And now all nature seemed in love
The lusty sap began to move;
New juice did stir the embracing vines,
And birds had drawn their Valentines."

And even earlier, Shakespeare's Ophelia sang;

"Tomorrow is St. Valentine's Day,
All in the morning betime,
And I a maid at your Window,
To be your Valentine."

Mr. Samuel Pepys in his Diary has this entry :—

“ This morning came up to my wife’s bedside, I being up dressing, little Will Mercer to be her Valentine ; and brought her name writ upon blue paper in gold letters, done by himself, very pretty . . .

In Pepys’ time, Valentines often took the shape of valuable pieces of jewellery or articles of dress and were sent to married ladies as well as those who were unmarried. In another entry in his diary Pepys mentions that one Sir W. Batten sent his wife six pairs of gloves, a pair of stockings and a pair of garters for her Valentine—a present that strikes one as being fairly comprehensive !

By the time Victoria was Queen, Valentines had become less rich and were usually in the form of dainty cards, decorated with silver and gold lace paper with gay pictures and verses of poetry that proclaimed more or less emphatically the warm sentiments of the sender. From the novels of the time, we gather that the postman was very eagerly looked forward to by maidens on the morning of February 14. And if there was a strict parent in the background and there seem to have been a great many in the Victorian age, life was made all the more exciting by the fact that a certain amount of secrecy often had to be observed in collecting these offerings to one’s charms. Often the Valentines were sent without any hint being given as to who was the sender. Then excited speculation fluttered many a maidenly heart, especially if there was an impecunious suitor who was frowned upon by “papa”. I often think that the young in the Victorian age must have had a lot of fun. So many things were forbidden by the strict conventions of the time, especially unchaperoned meetings between the opposite sexes that life must have been continually exciting, planning how to break the rules. For broken they were, and often a Valentine was sent as an indication of feelings that had but little opportunity of being expressed any other way.

Such a one I found among those in the old box. On it was a picture of a cottage, framed in white and gold lace and the poem was called... "To Offer Love to Thee".

"If you will share my cottage,
I'll wish for nought more,
For care would be driven,
By Love from our door."

Love in a cottage was considered the highlight of romance in the Victorian age when cottages were lived in by the poor and not by the well-to-do for week-ends as they are today. But it was not encouraged by cautious parents.

Another Valentine had obviously been sent by an accepted suitor who had had a little difficulty in convincing his sweetheart as to his sincerity. He expresses himself very forcefully in a white and gold Valentine, with a picture of a bird hovering over a gay bunch of flowers.

"I've told thee, I've told thee,
A hundred times o'er,
I love thee, I love thee, what can I say more?
I care not for wealth and I care not for fame,
I love thee and thy love is all that I claim.
Then look not thus doubting nor turn thee
away,
And cease to reproach me thus, day by day,
I tell thee again as I've told thee before,
I'll love thee until I can love thee no more."

That, one feels should have reassured the most doubting maiden, but even if it didn't, it must have made pleasant reading for her!

Another Valentine made of gold and white lace paper had a heart-shaped space in the centre which was headed simply, "Love" followed by this poem.

“Pleasant as the rosy dawning,
Gracious as the golden sky,
Sparkling as the brightest morning,
Smiles the maid for whom I sigh.”

Not very different perhaps in sentiment from the remark made by the hero of an American film who as he lay dying, said to his sweetheart these unforgettable words, “Baby. You’re still tops with me”! But how much more elegantly did our Victorian express it!

Another charming old Valentine shows a lady sitting on a Regency couch against a bright blue background with a plump pink Cupid suspended in mid-air above her. This must have been sent by a rather diffident suitor for it says:—

“At eve may you recline your head,
Balmy sleep its happy influence shed,
That waking you may to my suit incline,
In favour take me for your Valentine.”

“Very pooty” as Septimus Forsyte might have said.

Besides these Valentines with their artless rhymes, there was one rather more elaborate with a three versed poem with punning rhymes on “Pear” and “Pair” with a picture of a pear-tree in the background. It must have been sent by an intellectual of the period for it is a little heavy and laboured and has not the charm of the simpler ones. Their charm lies in their simplicity and their recognition of the fact that all a lover need say is “I love you” and that when he had said that, he had said everything his sweetheart wanted to hear. As an unknown “somebody” has inscribed on the walls of Burford Church.

“.....Love made me Poet,
And this I writt,
My harte did do yt,
And not my witt.”

A LITTLE GOSSIP

THERE is no doubt that the world would be a much duller place than it is if people had never gossiped about themselves and their neighbours. It is the little bits of gossip that we hear about the great ones of the past that make them come alive for us today. King Alfred may have been a very great king no doubt, and we may dimly remember that he divided our day up into twenty-four hour stretches for us, but it is as the King who had his ears boxed by an irate country wife for letting her cakes burn that most of us remember him. The "Divinity that doth hedge a king" may have served its purpose in the past, but to moderns, it is the little odds and ends that have drifted down through the ages about the kingly ones in their "off moments" from kingship that change them from pasteboard figures to living men. Who would remember King Ethelred except that gossip had it that he was always "Unready" and to many of us George III only exists because he once said to Fanny Burney when discussing Shakespeare's plays, "Sad stuff, Miss Burney, what? Sad stuff". We like him as a human being all the better for the honesty of his opinion while as a revelation of himself as a man, it tells us far more than any conventional history about him could do.

Today we are rather apt to decry gossip about our public men, yet nevertheless we none of us can help being interested when any of it comes our way. When for example we read criticisms of Mr. Churchill's strategy and policy it is somehow comforting to remember that according to gossip he was an ardent bricklayer in his spare time during his years of obscurity. It is hard to explain why, but there is something a little endearing about the thought of that impatient spirit laying his bricks with what we hope was painstaking care. It shows a side of his character

that many of us did not know existed. While Lord Hankey's recent revelations that the Prime Minister sleeps during the day and calls conferences during the night is equally enlightening. It may all be described as gossip, of course, but of what an enchanting quality.

Gossip about that queer man, Adolf Hitler, we all read greedily. It may not be true that he bursts into tears and lies on the carpet and kicks like a naughty baby when things are tense, but how very satisfying to read that he does so! Here is no superman, we realise at once, but a man who finds things too much for him at moments as we all do. While the fact that his friend Mussolini has had to stay himself with apples without the comfort of flagons ever since he came to power somehow emphasises on what an unsound basis his regime existed. There is a lack of balance all round, you feel.

Few of us know what Mr. Gladstone said in 1895 or indeed at any other time but the fact that once at a dinner party he explained to the guests that the only possible way of packing a wet bath sponge was to wrap it in a bath towel and stamp on it, sticks in the mind like a burr. The picture of that majestic man treading water out of his sponge is more vivid than the fact that he wanted to disestablish the Church.

Occasionally one meets strong minded people who tell you in tones of superiority that they never listen to gossip. I must confess that to certain types of gossip, I can listen for hours. In my younger days I had a school friend who was a dull soul, but I found her fascinating because she had the most entrancing set of relations I have ever heard of, and about whom it was a joy to listen. That I never knew them, (most of them were dead and gone) made no difference. Their "goings on" never failed to find me a delighted listener. They were just an ordinary middle class family as far as I remember, but the things that had happened in their family circle! There was my friend's

Great Uncle Samuel for one, who married a very young and beautiful Great Aunt Sarah. Samuel was elderly and Sally was young and gay, and alas, though rich, Great Uncle Samuel was very mean, and kept his young wife short of money. He also kept large sums of gold in the house in canvas bags. Great Aunt Sally with the flames of youth leaping high within her, recklessly abstracted gold sovereigns from the bags and replaced them with halfpence. Then one day Great Uncle Samuel discovered what she had done, and there was a dreadful scene. The beautiful Sally had to fly, literally for her life, for Great Uncle Samuel would undoubtedly have killed her if he could have caught her. He told members of the family so and they did not doubt that he meant it. He forgave her in time, but my friend's great aunt has stayed in my mind as a vivid and memorable figure whom I feel I have known more intimately than a lot of living people.

Family gossip like this I find enthralling and even when it is not of such dramatic quality, it is just as attractive. It is when people who obviously find themselves interesting, gossip about themselves that one finds it a little tedious and dull. The woman who, for example, tells you about her unselfishness and the great ones she has met and how she was as a candle to moths with all the men of her acquaintance when she was young, is hard to bear patiently. And people with one track minds who can only discuss illnesses bring it home to one that there is gossip and gossip. Good gossip should have the quality of impersonality to be interesting. That is why so few people gossip well about themselves. There are exceptions like Samuel Pepys but then there has only been one Pepys and he gossiped about himself to himself in his diary, and not to other people.

It is sometimes argued that gossip is unkind and does a lot of harm and there is little doubt that good gossip has to have a little malice in it to be enjoyable. On the other hand it is a queer thing that the majority

of people would sooner be gossiped about even though it is a little malicious than not be noticed at all. They will repeat to you gossip that has been said about them with a certain amount of indignation, but behind it is nearly always a latent satisfaction although they may not be conscious of it. They have been marked out as individuals from the herd and that in itself is always pleasurable. Really malicious and ugly gossip is however nearly always boring and leaves a nasty taste in the mouth. It is comforting that there is so little of it.

Perhaps our attitude to gossip has changed nowadays because we are more conscious of ourselves and other people and we are intensely interested in any details that go to explain our own and other people's behaviour. And it is often little bits of gossip that supply these details. Also there is no doubt that the war gives a filip to our liking for it, for ordinary life these days is so full of horrors that no work of fiction can possibly compete with it. We go back to the "small beer" of ordinary living with a feeling of positive relief. Our neighbours may not be spectacular, and frankly, we do not want them to be. There is more spectacle in the world at present and most of it painted in horror and cruelty than many of us can bear. A Jane Austenish sort of world with ordinary people falling in love, marrying, living and dying and gossip about them comes to satisfy a need that most of us feel. And after all, if we accept what we hear, unjudgingly, and as just a manifestation of the fascination human beings show in their reaction to living, there is little harm done. If the immaculate seeming Mrs. A. throws saucepans at her husband on occasion, or that pillar of respectability Mr. B. "goes gay" at night-clubs and balances a bottle of champagne on his bald pate, and their friends talk about it, does it really matter? As we look at them in their more conventional moments it is exciting to speculate what really goes on behind their bland façades which makes them throw saucepans and behave so unexpectedly.

On the whole, we are apt to like most people better for hearing a little gossip about them. It makes them more of a piece with ourselves and gives us a sense of our common humanity. Most of us put up a pretence of being different from what we are before the world. As an old countrywoman once said "There's a lot about myself I keep to myself", and most of us are like that. None of us like to wear our hearts on our sleeves for daws to peck at. Most of us are simple souls though, when all is said and done and what we are is usually pretty evident. A little gossip perhaps enables people to get at the truth about us a little more quickly, that is all.

WHEN EVERY WOMAN WAS A NINNY

THE more one reads of the lives of our grandparents the more one is struck by the fact that life is a much simpler business for all of us these days. True, there are things like Income Tax forms to fill up but if they bother you too much there is always a man at the bank who will do them for you. And war although it makes life difficult in many ways, simplifies things still further. We find out how many things we had in our lives that were unnecessary now that we cannot get them.

Of course dictators, as is their way, overdo things. They would make life so simple for us that our thinking would be done for us, the clothes we wear chosen, the food we eat and even our mates and the number of children we have would all be laid down by an order. But man with his usual contrariness rebels against such wholeheartedness. He likes to keep a few difficulties

to get his teeth into and rightly so. Otherwise life would be a dull business.

But compared with the lives say of our Victorian forbears how comparatively uncomplicated our lives seem today. Think what impossible standards of behaviour were expected from Victorian men! No wonder an American authoress once wrote that the average Englishwoman looked upon the average Englishman as half God, half goat. She was wrong, of course, but we've all met the kind of attitude which is a relic of Victorian times that made her generalise so rashly. It dates back to when every man was expected to be a gentleman, or if he couldn't manage that, at least he had to be gentlemanly. And what things Victorian ladies expected from their gentlemen! They were always expected to be as brave as lions and face savage dogs, mad bulls and drunken bullies without a quiver. How much simpler things are for men today. They can admit quite frankly that they are terrified of dogs and bulls and call a policeman to deal with a drunk and no one thinks any the worse of them. If shipwrecked it was the gentlemen of the party who were expected to know at sight which fruits were safe to eat on a desert island and who always carried a magnifying glass to make fire from the sun's rays. While building a log hut with nothing but a pocket knife to cut down the trees was taken as a matter of course.

Then think how difficult it must have been for them to subscribe to the conventional opinions then held about women. They had to act as if women were ethereal beings who had no legs, no internal organs and were divinities to be worshipped at a distance. They were told that women were tender helpless creatures and this in face of the fact that women built like battleships were a commonplace in the Victorian scene! The Georgian man at least does not have to pretend these things and can think of women in terms that call for asterisks if necessary. It must make life much simpler for him in every way.

For women of course, their present day life is much simpler than it has ever been before. They need no longer be "disappointed in love" as they were expected to be once upon a time when the young man of the moment failed "to pop" as Mr. Trollope's Miss Anne Prettyman has it. Nowadays a young man and young woman can go about together for months and no one is surprised if at the end of it all, they do not marry. Then women were always expected to be registering extreme sensibility so that they swooned on the slightest provocation. Probably their tight stays helped them to do this, but the discomfort they must have suffered must have been tremendous. Nowadays there are hordes of women who have never swooned in their lives and would not know what the "vapours" were if they met them.

Nowadays women can eat what they like and drink too if they wish. No man thinks the worse of his lady love if when he takes her out to lunch she enjoys a beef steak. Yet her Victorian prototype would have fluttered and swooned at the thought. As for alcohol women used to be allowed a little weak wine and water at their meals or a little negus, last thing at night and that finished their wine bibbing for the day. Today women can even confess to a liking for beer without losing face, although if they wish to be popular in these days of scarcity it is better to refuse it if it is offered. But there were so many things that were considered ungenteel in a Victorian female and so many things that were "not done" that it's a wonder the poor things bothered to live at all. They were supposed to have no head for cards so were not allowed to play whist and the same weakness of head applied to them if they tried to talk about politics.

Perhaps most of all where modern women find things simpler is that they no longer have to keep thinking about being "ladylike". At its best it must have been a dreadful ideal to have to follow for its

conventions were so complicated. To be ladylike one always had to wear gloves out of doors, have a small waist and pretend that babies came out of gooseberry bushes. In short, just as men were always expected to be brave a woman was always expected to be a ninny. One cannot feel that human nature has changed so much that women were any stupider then than they are today. They merely had to pretend much harder that they were.

In household affairs of course, life has been simplified enormously for women. Think of those fantastic washdays when all the dirty clothes having been collected for a month they made one grand effort which filled the house with soapy steam and women's hearts with despair. Then those innumerable white starched petticoats with frills everywhere that had to be ironed and with no electric irons to take the strain! Robert Lynd remarks in one of his essays how very charming it is to see a line of family washing ballooning in the wind and to speculate on the various wearers of the garments. But being a man he probably does not realise the amount of effort that has to be put out before clothes get to the stage of ballooning so amusingly and charmingly. Most women see more charm in the steam laundry van when it calls each Monday morning.

It may be argued that making life a simple business takes a lot of excitement out of living. It is true that there must have been a lot of tremors in the lives of the Victorians. For one thing most of them were brought up to believe that hell fire was a very fierce reality and Victorian girls were very apprehensive about the dangers that came about if you let a gentleman kiss you too much before you were married. They had different fears from ourselves but I doubt if they had more. And no one can complain today that life lacks excitement. For one thing we are all full of excited speculations as to what our post-war world is going to be like and for another, air-raids in our lives disagree-

able though they are, give a certain zest to living. With death as a near possibility, life takes on a certain tang and a keenness of perception quickens in most of us. We are almost back to where we were as primitive people and with almost the same problems. But there is one good thing. Women no longer have to pretend to be ninnies and men don't have to pose as heroes all the time. We can all, more or less, be ourselves which should be simplicity itself!

ILLUSIONS WOMEN HAVE ABOUT MEN AND THEMSELVES

IT is surprising how certain illusions that women have about men and themselves have persisted in spite of the fact that they will not stand the light of examination for a moment. For most of them, women are responsible and it would seem that they have kept on repeating them like a salesman repeats a formula about the product he is selling—on the principle that if only you say the same thing often enough, someone is bound to believe you. For women have made some very queer statements about men in their time and a lot of them are still in circulation and taken as true.

Take for instance the well-worn statement that men are simple souls like great big boys to be read like an open book by women, while women themselves are deep, inscrutable, complex and not to be understood by the ordinary big blundering male. This opinion is held by most women and one wonders why? For there does not seem a shred of evidence to support it. Even Cleopatra was not so inscrutable and subtle as all that, neither was Helen of Troy, and from what we read, neither of them can be considered just ordinary women. Yet as their actions show, they were remark-

ably simple souls who knew what they wanted and went after it with the directness that is supposed to be a purely male characteristic. Men can match women subtlety for subtlety, not only in everyday life but even when they are in love and supposed to be in a condition when their minds simply do not function. Often when a woman thinks she knows exactly how a man's mind is working, she is completely off the track. Ask nine out of ten women whether their husbands were exactly how they thought they would be after marriage and if they tell the truth they will admit that after marriage they had a lot to learn. And even when people have been married to each other for a long time, husbands and wives can still surprise each other by the unexpectedness of their behaviour.

The truth would seem that men have acquiesced in the theory of women's complexity and their own simplicity because it saves them a lot of trouble. When a woman is upset for some unknown reason it is much easier to accept it as a woman's whimsey than to spend a lot of time trying to find out what is the matter. Men live on the surface of their daily life much more than women because their work is usually more important to them than human relationships and takes up the bulk of their energy. Women on the other hand unless they are engaged in creative work of some kind, have much more time to spend in analysing and sifting motives. If their house occupies them, often it is only their hands that are used and not their minds. So much of a woman's work in a home is necessarily routine and they have a lot of mental energy that is never used. So they expend it in trifles like wondering what So-and-So meant when a perfectly simple remark was made, and in imagining things. Most men have neither the time or the energy to spare from their work for this, so when women present them with some intricately built up case, they are amazed and think that women's minds are very complex.

Then there is the theory, still widely held and fostered by women that they are tender plants, to be protected and sheltered by men in a rough world. This opinion appears to be held side-by-side with the one that men are "great big babies". As if a baby, however big could protect you from anything or a simple soul be any help in time of trouble! Besides in these days, there must be few men who believe in the "tender plant" theory especially if they have ever played in a mixed hockey match and been half-crippled by a "swipe" over the shins from one of the so-called "tender ones!" But women still use this old gambit and seemingly men accept it because it is less trouble than trying to prove its absurdity.

The truth is, that both men and women are very much alike and conditioned by their environment in exactly the same way. When women were in an inferior position as in the Victorian age, they had to use guile to get what they wanted. So they exploited their "mystery" and their "complexity" because it attracted men as being different from themselves and made marriage a possibility. But psychologically, there is very little difference between men and women. They both react in the same way to jealousy, fear, possessiveness and power. Put a man in power who has had to fight his way up from the bottom and he reacts in exactly the same way as a woman who has been conditioned by the same environment. Women are no harder or softer than men either in business or in living. The idea that under a harsh exterior a man hides a great big soft heart is as misleading as that a woman, all softness and curves outside, is as hard as nails inside. If a man has a face like a steel grille, he is probably just as much a mixture of hardness and softness as a man with a face like a baby. There are hard women and hard men and soft-hearted ones of both sexes. We are as we are because of heredity and environment and the same factors when present influence both men and women.

But these illusions that both men and women have about each other should be scotched, for they provide a false basis for living and lead to ill-adjusted relationships between the sexes. D. H. Lawrence saw this relationship as a constant struggle between men and women with women always trying to dominate men, while Bertrand Russell in one of his essays says that the real struggle between men and women has hardly started. But why should there be any fight between them at all? Women's attitude to men and that of men to women has always been conditioned by the fact that in the past women were considered inferior to men. But already since this last war started there has been a change. Women workers in England are being paid exactly the same wages as men, working the same number of hours and under the same conditions. This kills one illusion that women are weaker than men and bears out what modern doctors have been telling us for ages; that women are as capable of physical endurance as men when they are put to it.

A new factor, too has arisen that is helping to kill these old illusions that have lasted far too long, and that is the example of Russian women since Russia was invaded. Its influence can hardly be measured at the moment, but read any paper from England and there are unmistakable signs that it is tremendously strong. If Russian women can take it as a matter of course that they should work alongside their men in factories and if necessary, take guns and kill the enemy in order to protect their children and homes, English women are asking themselves why they should not be allowed and expected to do the same? After all when a bomb falls, it kills men and women equally and men can protect women no longer from modern warfare. This war environment is changing women's attitude and it should lead to a healthier relationship between men and women. For it is not good that women should regard men either as grown-up babies or alternatively as the oak to their mistletoe; neither is it sound that

men should regard women as unreasonable illogical creatures whom they cannot understand. If we have a world where men and women can see and accept each other as they really are, human beings very much alike, working towards a common goal, it would be all to the good.

Such a comradeship will not take away from the real mystery and complexity that will always be present in any relationship between men and women. Inside all of us is a "dark forest" and it is when glimpses of this are seen that the eternal wonder and surprise of human beings is sensed. None of us are open books even to our nearest and dearest, neither are we deep wells that cannot be fathomed. The truth lies somewhere between. The amount of truth we know about ourselves is a pointer to understanding other human beings. But do let us stop thinking of one half of the world as grown-up babies. It is so old-fashioned!

DID YOU SAY WHISKERS?

GOING about the streets today, one cannot help but notice the fact that there are more bearded men about than there used to be. Razor blades, we know are not plentiful and more expensive than they were, but it would seem that when times are adventurous, then men grow beards. The Elizabethans, rumbustious fellows, are a case in point. The world was their oyster and they went about opening it with their swords in no uncertain fashion, and to a man they swaggered before the world with their pointed beards. It is true that they cut down their personal washing to a minimum if history is to be believed and they were such busy fellows that it is quite likely that they could not be bothered to shave, any

more than they washed. But on the other hand, they kept their beards very nattily trimmed so time could not have been so precious after all. It would seem much sounder to believe that it is the adventurous spirit that urges men to let their whiskers grow, for the same thing happened again during the industrial Revolution in England. Adventure was just as much in the air at that time as when Philip of Spain challenged Elizabeth, only it was the adventure of commerce and industry. The pen had taken the place of the sword, but there was just as much swashbucklery going on in board rooms as on a battlefield. And riding in a railway train for the first time seemed as great an adventure and productive maybe of as much bloodshed as storming a city. While heaven alone knew what would happen when the new gas-lighting got going!

It was perhaps in the Victorian age that beards were at their most magnificent. Young men of nineteen wore them and looked like men of fifty, while older men looked like patriarchs and had to a whisker, an appearance of deep wisdom that nothing that they did or said, justified. But even if you are not wise, it is a great help to look it, and it is a pretty point how much the beard of the Victorian gentleman helped to keep the Victorian woman in her place. It must have been hard for the most audacious feminine rebel to protest when faced by authority in a bushy beard! Even today, they can awe the most frivolous minded woman. Besides which, they had more practical uses than keeping rebellious womanhood in its place. For ill health flourished among the Victorians in no small degree and no wonder. Their hermetically sealed rooms with heavy velvet hangings that must have held the dust of years, must have been full of germs, while their heavy meals must have kept their internal plumbing in a constant state of overwork. So beards were often advised by family doctors when chests were weak, to be worn instead of red flannel, an economy that must have pleased our hard-headed ancestors mightily.

Even in Edwardian times, beards, not so bushy, it must be admitted, still flourished, but by now they were mostly the attributes to old and middle age. Men had begun to take to playing games more earnestly and probably a sense of fitness suggested that a beard did not go well with a pair of football shorts, neither did a full beard look its best when the head above it was only crowned with a small cap instead of a silk hat. W. G. Grace of course, wore a cap and a fierce black beard, but he was more or less an eminent Victorian rather than Edwardian and his cricket was both adventurous and piratical if stories told about him are true. Probably if cricketers had gone on wearing beards, there would not have arisen the moans about the dullness of modern county cricket. The pirate and the adventurer would have risen above the batting and bowling averages !

With the coming of Americans into our national life, beards became a rarity. Probably this is because America is a country where youth is adored and not looked upon as a deplorable period that must be got over as quickly as possible as we look upon it in England. And with the introduction of the cinema, beards received a bitter blow. Because on the screen they became the symbol of villainy and not wisdom and few men care to look villains even if they have a bent that way. Also the brisk alert business man became the American ideal of manhood. Slickness and smartness were the qualities to be looked for and it must be well-nigh impossible however strong your personality to look "slick" from behind a beard. So beards when seen, were worn only by writers and artists and what was their deathblow, began to be considered "artistic". It was the adventurers of the mind, the intellectual rebels who began to wear them and to the ordinary man they became a symbol of crankiness, of oddity, and as such were to be avoided.

It is hard to understand why. Montagu Norman the Governor of the Bank of England wears a beard

and has never caused financiers a moment's uneasiness by any sign of unconventionality. The Bank of England is as sound as ever it was. While Aldous Huxley had for the hero of one of his books a man who was nothing at all until he began to wear a false beard. Then he blossomed out into a devil of a fellow, especially where ladies were concerned. They fell before his charms as corn before the reaper when he surveyed them from behind his beard. Such confidence and charm did he gain, and that, mark you, from a beard that was not his own. True, there was a time in England when small boys called "Beaver" after the wearers of beards. But that should have put no-one off. Small boys are notoriously given to commenting rudely over the slightest thing.

It seems a little unfair that soldiers should not be allowed to wear beards when men in the Navy are allowed to be as whiskery as they please. Somehow there is something about a bearded ship's captain that inspires confidence in the faintest of hearts. You feel if you were torpedoed and had to take to the boats that you would suck buttons with much more confidence if the man at the helm wore a beard. You would be bound to be picked up or make a landing somewhere. But our Brigadiers and Generals have to do without such a help. Some of the Russian Generals are bearded and look all the stouter fellows for it. But King's Regulations say sternly, "Whiskers, if worn..." and then go on to give the length and breadth of the offending hairs to the nearest centimetre. So that however piratical and adventurous a soldier you are, you can only express it through the medium of a moustache that looks like a worn toothbrush. Such repression would daunt the most unconventional strategist and probably that is what it is designed for. But it would be interesting to try one bearded brigadier as an experiment!

And now we live in adventurous times again, and once more beards are taking the air. For it is adven-

turous even for civilians when you do not know whether the next minute might not be your last. For that is what life is like when air-raids may happen at any time. And although they are unpleasant and uncomfortable and we would all rather be without them, it cannot be denied that they add a zest to living. When peace comes, however, we shall all be glad to feel un-adventurous again and if beards go into oblivion as a result, well, it will be worth it. But perhaps some hardy soul will try and develop the North and South Poles for those seem the only places left where man has not settled. Then beards will undoubtedly come into their own again !

TIP.....AND RUN!

EVERYBODY agrees that when this present war ends, the world is going to be a very different place. It is going to be better in every way and with many injustices remedied. That is all to the good, but so far, everybody is very vague as to what is actually going to be done. Jam tomorrow, but never jam today as it were. There is one small reform, however, that would make the world a much better place for a lot of us, and we need not wait until the end of the war to make it. And that is to abolish the giving of tips.

I am one of those unlucky beings who can never give a tip without feeling ashamed and furtive about it. It embarrasses me to give presents to anyone unless I know them well, and although a tip is hardly a present, yet the giving of it implies a degree of familiarity that I feel is unjustified upon my part. It also implies a tacit acceptance on my part that the one who is tipped is not getting a fair wage for his work, and that

I know it, and am trying to do something rather inadequate about it.

Perhaps the manner of my first tipping has something to do with the whole business. I was still at school in my early teens and had been staying with friends. Changing trains, I was walking down the platform carrying a small suitcase when an ancient grey headed guard came up to me and said, "Where y'r going, Miss?" I told him, and taking my suitcase from me, he said, "You come along with me". So I went. It seemed quite natural to me that he should take charge of me and carry my case. With two brothers and a father who always seemed to carry things for one, at that age I thought that was what the male sex were for! The ancient one put me in a carriage and arranged my suitcase lovingly on the rack. Then he waited. Luckily I grasped why, and with many blushes and a secret fear that he might think I was being impertinent, I offered him sixpence. To my intense surprise, he took it. I think that from that moment was dated my lack of respect for people older than myself, merely because they *were* older. Since then, my elders have had to earn any respect I give them by sheer merit! I can still remember my feeling, (it was almost contempt) that a man who looked as old as my grandfather should take money from me. For up to that time, it was I who had received tips, not given them, so that the guard appeared to me like a blackleg does to a good Trades Unionist. It had been one of the supreme virtues of older people that they gave you at odd unexpected moments a tip that came like manna from Heaven. And here was a greybeard who had outraged the convention. Or what was worse, turned it topsy-turvy.

That giving of my first tip was a landmark. Not noticeable at first, maybe, but it subtly changed me. Age was no longer sacred to me and I began to doubt whether my elders were as wise or different from myself as I had thought. So perhaps there are strong

reasons for making tipping a forbidden thing if it causes the young to look with suspicion upon the wisdom of their elders! That most people feel a certain amount of discomfort when they give a tip is evident from the furtive way many of them push their offerings under a saucer or plate when they leave a restaurant. I have even found three pence underneath a cruet once, when I was fidgetting absent-mindedly with it while waiting to be served. And from the guilty quickness with which I covered up those six halfpence you would have thought I was a criminal. But I did have the feeling that I had somehow stumbled on a very private transaction and that I ought to remove myself as quickly as possible.

There are some people, however, who do not share my dislike of tipping. They scatter tips as trees do their leaves in autumn. Like Mr. Trollope's Will Belton, "They are always good for sixpence", and waiters and porters seem to recognise them at a glance. Usually people who are like this are not particularly well off. They have been known to borrow the money for their tips from their more modest friends and forget to pay it back. But nothing stops them scattering largesse. The only people they do not tip are their friends and you often find yourself wondering why? Certainly if T.F. Powys is right, and giving money is one way of making people happy, the ardent tipper must bring sweetness and light wherever he goes. And yet one doubts it. People who receive tips as part of their daily routine never strike one as being particularly happy. Apprehension seems to surround them, and an air of strain.

Perhaps the person we most of us dislike is the man who tips to get preferential treatment. How very pleased we are when he grumbles that he has not had it! I have heard sad stories from people who have given tips at the beginning of a sea voyage and have not had their money's worth of extra attention. From a psychological point of view, it is a foolish thing to

do. It is better to dangle the carrot in front of a donkey if you want to encourage him, rather than to give the carrot first.

If it is impossible to abolish tipping altogether, then it should be made universal. You could tip your doctor, (provided he lowered his fees first) or your lawyer or your clergyman. Even Cabinet Ministers could have a modest twopence or sixpence pressed into shrinking palm when they have deserved well of their country. Then the class distinction that is at present attached to tips would disappear. On the other hand, many of us would prefer that everyone's salary should be sufficient so that tipping would be considered undignified and unnecessary. Think how much more restful life would be for the majority of people, especially when they are young and inexperienced. Who, in their early days has not spent quite an appreciable time worrying over, "How much ought I to give the waiter?" when dining out at a restaurant? For somehow when one is young, the idea is given out that to give too large a tip, earns a waiter's scorn, and too small a one puts one in very much the same case.

The former is a fallacy we realise as we grow older. The larger the tip, the more dignity it confers on both giver and recipient. And if it is only large enough, say a thousand pounds, it steps right out of its class and becomes a bonus, a grant or an honorarium. It is a delicate matter to decide at what stage a tip becomes one of these things and so becomes respectable.

How much easier, then, it would be, to abolish tips and only have bonuses or grants or what you will, of a respectable size! Except perhaps in the case of children. To them, there is no class distinction about the odd sixpence or shilling, bestowed as the spirit is moved. It is a gift from the gods, an unexpected addition to the joy of life that enables them to buy the heart's desire of the moment. It would be an ill gesture to deprive them of it.

CLOTHES, MIRRORS OF SOCIETY

CLOTHES worn by men and women have always been mirrors of the state of civilisation society has reached. And when there are changes in the social order, their reflections have always been seen in the clothes that people wear. In fact, some historians hold that women's clothes in particular, reflect the social and political trends of an age as faithfully, as books written or speeches made.

To some people this may sound nonsense. Women's clothes, they think are trivial, creations of a mood, transient nothings of a day. It is when one begins to study past and present fashions in relation to the age when they were worn that one realises that women's clothes have a deep significance.

For example, what can give a better picture of France after the Revolution than the clothes that women wore then? Liberty, equality and fraternity were the watchwords on everyone's tongue and because the old order had broken down completely, liberty, a heady wine if you are not used to it, became licence.

And women's clothes showed an abandon that reflected it. All restraint was thrown aside and dresses made of finest muslin, dipped in water and moulded to the figure while still wet were often fashionable women's only covering, while most women went about half naked. Later, when it dawned on people that liberty to be enjoyed fully, implied discipline and restraint, these fashions disappeared, and women went to the other extreme, and wore the crinoline and dresses that covered their bodies almost completely.

In the Victorian age in England, when women had few legal rights and little or no economic independence,

their clothes were again an index of the social scene. Early Victorian women wore the crinoline that gave them the air of beings set apart from men and emphasised their strangeness. This gave men a feeling that women's value depended on their sex only, and to make their sex as provocative as possible and so make men desire them was women's only weapon to get economic security. So in contrast to the shrouded appearance of the rest of their bodies, necks and arms and bosoms were left bare.

Dresses were worn that moulded the top part of the body tightly, emphasising the bosom, the tiny waist, which in turn drew attention to the rounded hips below. As marriage was the only career for women in those days, women did everything to achieve it through the art of dress. It was woman's instinctive weapon to get security in what was then, a purely man ruled world.

Later, in Edwardian times, women still suffered from the same disadvantages. True, higher education for women had begun, but it was still in its infancy, and was having a hard struggle. So women still emphasised their sex in their dress. The Gibson Girl figure with its pronounced backward curve was an ideal that every woman tried to achieve, and long tightly fitting skirts, silk petticoats (how often in the novels of the time did the silken "frou-frou" of her skirts herald the heroine!) tight jackets and above all, firmly boned stays still kept women in their place in the established scheme of things.

But progress was in the air. The safety bicycle was invented and some daring spirits among women actually so far forgot themselves and their womanhood as to ride these far from lady-like machines. Fathers stormed and mothers wept about their daughters' behaviour. It was no use. Freedom had come for women at last, for it was impossible to ride a bicycle in a long skirt and stays that demanded an 18-inch waist. Some-

thing had to give way, and it was the iron stays, and the tightly fitting clothes that went. Mrs. Amelia Bloomer introduced her rational dress for women with its knickerbockers, oh horror ! worn in full view of all the world. The women who wore it in Hyde Park were mobbed, it is true. But the walls of convention had cracked badly. Shorter skirts were worn and looser clothes and the shattering fact that respectable ladies had legs was faced reluctantly. Women began to play games and move about more and their emancipation had begun !

When the war came in 1914, women for the first time were admitted by the community to have a value equal to men. Sheer necessity brought this about for with most of the men away fighting, women had to be allowed into industry and some of the professions. Again, women's clothes mirrored the change in her status. Her short skirts proclaimed her desire to be freed from anything that was hampering, while she cut her hair short for comfort and to escape from the tyranny that the dressing of long hair entails. Trousers were worn and in every way, by abolishing fashions that had hampered their physical freedom in the past, women showed that they felt themselves equal to men.

With their new economic independence, marriage was no longer the only career for women, so they dropped the emphasis on sex that had marked their dress for so long. Almost overnight, they became a race of boyish looking, flat chested, slim hipped creatures who played games as vigorously as men. They wore shirts and shorts and scanty swimming suits that exposed their bodies as much as possible to the sun and the air. The "mystery" that had surrounded women for so long was destroyed by women themselves, because it was no longer necessary to them. And although they displayed their bodies more openly than ever before, there was nothing of the provocative emphasis on sex in their dress such as had been there previously. It

was not what was revealed, but the manner of its revealing that showed the difference in women's new position in society.

Then gradually in the post-war years came a change. Insecurity came everywhere. Wars and dictators with their threats of war kept the world on edge, and another war, from being a remote possibility, became almost a certainty. Women again began to sense their dependence on men for their own safety and that of their children. However much they had insisted that they were equal to men, no-one had ever suggested that they could fight to defend themselves. Their instinct, so sound where the race is concerned, urged them to stress their need of protection. And again, fashion mirrored their feelings. The stark masculinity of the immediate post-war years gradually became modified. Hair was allowed to grow long and fashions based on those worn in the "safe" and most feminine periods of history, the Victorian and Edwardian were gradually adopted. The lovely sway and swing of the crinoline, so provocatively beautiful were seen again; dresses whose bodies were tightly moulded to the figure were worn and stays were again designed to give women tiny waists and curved hips.

The boyish looking, slim hipped, flat chested ideal of feminine beauty became out of date, and everything was worn that would give women an air of softness and fragility. Dress designers made strenuous efforts to persuade women to adopt short dresses for the evening, but they were unsuccessful. Women's instinct, unerring where men are concerned, urged her to emphasise strongly her fragility and need of protection through the most feminine of clothes. Perhaps the fact that there was a large body of opinion among men determined never to have war again, stimulated women's sub-conscious appeal to the strong protective instinct that men have for them. As always, women used their dress to express what they were not able to put into words.

It may be argued against all this that many of the best dress designers are men. Or at least that men have an equal say with women as to the clothes that women wear. But I have a theory that male dress designers who become famous, do so, because they have an extra sense where women's clothes are concerned and are able to translate into concrete form what they sense women want to wear, before women are ready to do it themselves. And after all, it is women who are the final arbiters as to whether a fashion shall be worn or not. It is not often realised, I think, that the great majority of women, often unable to put into words what they feel about the age they live in, express their attitude through the clothes they wear, even in an age of mass production. Women, especially inarticulate ones, and by inarticulate women, I mean those who are unable to use words with precision to express their thoughts about the times they live in, act in accordance with some primitive instinct that is always biologically sound. Nature sees to that.

It is a fascinating subject, this question of women and their clothes. So casual seeming on the surface and yet with such deep implications. An anonymous poet once wrote,

“My Love in her attire doth show her wit,
It doth so well become her :
For every season she hath dressings fit,
For winter, spring and summer.”

But wit, I think is only half the story where the choice of women's clothes is concerned. There is something deeply instinctive as well. Women's clothes have always been their response to the age in which they live when other means of self expression were denied them. What makes it so very interesting is, that in the present age when women have so many other means of self expression, they have gone back to the primitive method of showing by their clothes, the social trends of the age they are living in. Lewis

Mumford in "Technics and Civilisation" an acute analysis of the influence of the machine on modern civilisation, says that many of the uses of scientific discovery will have to be scrapped if men are to lead full and happy lives and not become the slaves of machines. With women, one feels how fundamentally primitive they are, even when living in a machine age, for spiritually and mentally it seems to have left them untouched. It is a comforting thought for the future of civilisation.

"THE PLAY'S THE THING....."

IN a copy of the *Sunday Times*, just come to hand, Mr. James Agate in his weekly article in that paper, amuses himself by making a list of the plays he would like to see if he could choose a whole week of theatre going. It is a goodly list for he has seen Bernhardt and Tree and all the giants of whom a later generation has only read. Instinctively one couldn't help but make out a similar list of one's own and from then on, it was only a short step to considering what a rich old world it was before the war and what a lot it had to give us in spite of all its faults.

Those matchless moments when the lights in the theatre went low, the murmuring died down and one leant forward expectantly as the curtain went up. Then the first words spoken, the first laugh rippling a little uncertainly through the house. One relaxed and sat back. The play was on!

From the time we are children the mystery and magic of the theatre claim us. It begins with our first Punch and Judy show, when the Showman and Dog Toby, the only two living people who have to do with it fascinate us as much as do the two puppets.

And the fascination goes on with varying degrees of intensity until we are old and grey. We act Shakespeare in the class room and anything else we can think of at home. If our theatre going is limited and we are short of material, we act the parson in church and preach sermons with only tables and chairs as audience if no one else will listen to us. Let us but once get the theatre in our blood and nothing stops us, either from acting plays ourselves or watching other people act them.

Our ancestors had this same passion for the theatre, too, and the Church was the first power to recognise the attraction of the theatre when it gave its mystery and miracle plays and strengthened its hold on an unlettered people through them. Then plays began to be genuine growths of the people's consciousness of the life around them, and we have the early plays like "Ralph Roister Doister" and "The Knight of the Burning Pestle". Then the Elizabethan theatre flowered and what a wealth it gave us! Shakespeare, "Rare Ben Jonson", Beaumont and Fletcher, Webster and Marlowe with many others, wrote plays which when acted today charm us as much as they did our ancestors.

When we first start our theatre going proper, it is usually in our teens and as most of us never have very much money then, it is usually limited in scope to plays that our parents think we ought to see. But it is when we go to college as a rule that the fury and fever of playgoing gets us in its grip. It is usually from the gallery that many of us see our first plays, and who can ever forget, those of us who have done it, that mad climb up what seemed even in those days, thousands of stairs? No wonder the genial attendant (always addressed as "George" by his colleagues, no matter where the theatre was) used to greet one with, "There, there, take it easy. You'll kill yourselves one of these days". For we used to take the climb at a non-stop run

from the bottom to the top so as not to be late, and to be quite speechless by the time we had to give up our tickets. Once there we settled ourselves on a narrow plank with nothing to rest our backs against, and often with the knees of the person sitting behind doing what seemed a slow screw-driver movement into one's bony shoulder blades. When enthusiasm ran high, this was often varied by a well directed kick into the middle of one's back. But apologies were given and taken in the right spirit, for the play was the thing, and nothing else mattered.

And what fun a gallery audience was! If it happened to be opera you were watching, the elderly man next to you, besides sharing his mint humbugs with you, would tell you about all the great ones he had heard in the past in the leading parts, while if it was Gilbert and Sullivan the whole gallery seemed well-nigh word perfect from start to finish. A friend of mine was once in the gallery of a theatre in Florence when opera was being given and to her great delight the whole gallery sang and joined in the choruses and sang them very well too, just as if they were under the conductor's eye! In England, we are a little too self-conscious for that perhaps, and the gulf between amateur and professional is very strictly recognised.

But perhaps the best gallery audience was that which went to Bernard Shaw's plays. They relished his hits with great gusto, especially when they were directed against themselves. I remember seeing "The Apple Cart" from a gallery seat. We were packed together like sardines, and for my sins I had, I think the fattest woman who was in the theatre that night sitting immediately behind me. It was in the gallery of the Prince's Theatre, Manchester, and the gallery seats there were very narrow, certainly not a foot wide, and of course without backs. I spent the whole of the evening with the fat lady's knees digging somewhere into my neck, for poor things, there was nowhere

else for them to go. At moments during the play, a consciousness of discomfort drifted across me, but Mr. Shaw and youth won. Even now, when one is older and to endure discomfort if it can be avoided seems a needless stupidity, it is no hardship to watch a play from the gallery. There is always so much friendliness and keenness there. It is of course pleasant to sit in the stalls and make an occasion of one's playgoing and a comfortable seat is never to be despised. But to an inveterate playgoer the important thing is the play. If that is right, then nothing else matters.

It is curious how the atmosphere of a theatre varies with the play that is being given in it. I once saw Tchekov's "The Seagull" and it may have been Tchekov's magic, but in the interval as the attendants handed round teas and lemonades, their voices took on a distinctly Tchekovian cadence as they said, "Sixpence, please" while even the audience had the same look as the actors on the stage. While the audience at a Shaw play always seems to have the same distinctive look. Rather brisk and bright like Mr. Shaw himself with the men in tweeds and the women given to wearing bead necklaces. While most revue audiences have a brittle quality. As if they might tinkle like glass if you tapped them.

At one time in our playgoing we used to make a feature of going to first nights if we could manage it, but these occasions were in a way different from going to see, say, "The Cherry Orchard" or a Shaw play. They were in a sense "Nights Out" and if Mr. Cochran was the producer and Noel Coward the author, the emotional intensity on the stage, and the excitement and expectancy off it gave the whole occasion something special about it. Besides on the first night, one often saw turns that were "cut" afterwards which made one feel rather privileged. After these first nights we used to go back to someone's flat to drink coffee and talk the show over. Seen in retrospect we realise how lucky we were to have such moments.

And now, exile and the war give us nothing but the cinema, which although admirable in its way, to one whose heart is given to the theatre is but a poor substitute. Not that one is ungrateful. It is something to be able to forget the war for a couple of hours and to laugh without thought and happily at someone's antics. But it is not the same. Films do not set the mind alight as a play does, neither do we get the roundness of an actor's personality on the screen in the same way as we do on the stage. Many of us when we go to see a film forget it almost before we reach home, with rare exceptions. But moments from plays stay with us for years. Who can forget Sybil Thorndike in "St. Joan" when she drew her sword and as it flashed cried, "Who is for God and His Maid?" "Who is for Orleans with me?" Or again when she said, "I will dare and dare and dare until I die!"

Perhaps one day there will be a world again when we can see plays and hear matchless words spoken with beauty and grace. Until it comes those of us who love the theatre must cherish the memories we have and count ourselves lucky to have had them. At the moment we all seem to be supers in a sorry drama with none of us very certain of our parts, but like everything else, it will pass. Once again we shall sit in a theatre and watch the lights go down and the curtain rise. Once again, the play will be on!

"GROW OLD ALONG WITH ME"

WITH the coming of another New Year, few of us think of the past one as a year that has gone out of our lives for ever. That in fact we are a year older. Most of us are busily engaged in looking to the future and wondering and hoping whether

the New Year will be a better one than its predecessor. We feel that perhaps it might have been worse, this old year that has just left us, but with incurable optimism we cannot help but feel that on the whole, the coming one could be a great deal better. We ignore the fact that we are steadily growing older. It seems quite unimportant.

Perhaps age has never seemed so desirable to any generation as it does to the one who were children in the war of 1914, and who in their maturity are now going through another upheaval. For it is a generation that has never had any future to look forward to and one that has never been allowed to live its life in that security that human beings need for their full development. Since 1918, the world has been in a state of unrest, and for the last ten years at least, we have all known that we were living on the edge of a volcano that would engulf us, sooner or later. Our lives have not been patterned to a design for living, but to a design for dying. To this knowledge, with many young people was added a keenness and intensity of feeling, and above all, a feeling of helplessness where their own future was concerned, that has made life, a bitter-sweet business. No wonder age seems to offer a refuge, where at least we shall not feel things so painfully or so keenly. We shall become, we hope, philosophers like Dr. Johnson's clergyman in whom "cheerfulness would keep creeping in". It will be a pleasant change for many of us.

When one is young, the pleasures of age seem innumerable. You can say more or less what you like, especially if you are of a conservative turn of mind, eat what you like unless you are an invalid, and spend money as you will. No one ever sends you to bed when you are in the middle of an interesting book, or when conversation is particularly fascinating. In fact if you choose never to go to bed at all, it is entirely your own affair.

Youth is supposed to be an enviable time in one's life, but I doubt if many young people find it so. It is the old who say, "Ah, if I were only twenty years younger", but how many of them would really like to be translated back twenty years? For the only purely happy time that occurs for most of us when we are young is when we are at the stage of young lambs leaping and gambolling about, eating and sleeping, with no responsibilities of our own at all. But this care-free state ceases from the time we begin to read and write. From then on, we struggle to cope with a complicated world whose difficulties increase until age comes. Then mysteriously, things seem to straighten themselves out; we retire and leave the fight to someone else. That is why, perhaps, one sympathises with the small boy who, when asked what he would like to be when he grew up, replied, "A retired colonel". Such a remark bears almost the mark of genius. One would have liked to have said it oneself. To have realised when so young the joys of age, is rare, and to have personified them in a retired colonel shows a discrimination that is almost startling.

For youth has so many things to trouble it. When you are at school, you seem hardly to have left the kindergarten before you are being prepared for examinations, while in adolescence, one is tormented with fears about one's mental and physical powers, one's popularity, and worst of all, with doubts about the wisdom of one's elders. It is an unstable and troubled world for most youngsters. Even when adolescence is over, the young are faced with the prospect of a world that is governed by the old, who regard with grave suspicion the ideas of a young generation, and with few exceptions, do their best to thwart them. The young are usually powerless because their elders hold the purse strings, and they must live. Of course they struggle if they are worth their salt, and obviously their struggle is partially successful, otherwise the world would not progress. But I think it is a mistake to think

that the majority of young people enjoy the fight. It takes up such a lot of energy that might be put to better use. Even when there is enough economic security for marriage to take place, if there are children, there is the problem of educating and equipping them for life. Always there is a sense of struggle.

How very different life must become when you have done your share of the world's work and can sit back and look at other people doing the struggling! To "be old and grey" does not necessarily imply that you need "be full of sleep" as well. Physically, it is difficult to see what there is to grumble at in age, itself. You cannot run so fast, perhaps, but then, who wants to? Running, even from necessity when you are young, is an uncomfortable business, and the few who do it for pleasure in their youth usually regret it. One should be glad to reach the age when it is considered unseemly. To be old nowadays does not always mean that you need be so fat that movement is painful, or that you must overeat so that your body causes you discomfort. And mentally, when you are old, you must achieve a sense of comfort that is blissful. For so many things that seemed important when you were young, must recede into their proper place in the scheme of things. No longer need you mind if you are not beautiful or brilliant or popular. Such things to age are not important. And if you have not been particularly successful in life either, well, what does it matter? The lark still sings and the apple trees still blossom in the spring and one grows philosophic about one's past failures.

Perhaps the best thing about age is that one grows more impersonal and gets a truer sense of values. You have learned what matters and what is unimportant and you are much readier to make allowances and to accept people as they are, without judging them. It is hard to be tolerant when one is young. You feel so deeply and strongly about what you believe in, and so

bitterly about those who oppose your beliefs. With age, it seems to me, you are more ready to believe that the other man is not such a black-hearted villain as he appeared in your youth. And that must be very comforting, for none of us really like to think ill of our fellow men.

When age does come, however, one would above all, like to attain the quality of mellowness. To be old and mellow, wise and tolerant, what a happy state to achieve! To be able to sit back and smile at the things that once used to sting and hurt! And to look at mankind struggling, with understanding and pity, and yet to be out of the struggle oneself. Most of us would sink back into such rest as in a feather bed.

Frankly, the more it is considered, the more alluring old age appears, but it also appears to need a certain amount of preparing for, if one is to get the most out of it, and to justify one's existence as an old person. For one thing, there must be no harassment about money matters, so if you have been an advocate of "Young Age Pensions" it would be as well to switch over to a strong advocacy of really satisfactory pensions for the old. Having arranged this, you should retreat back mentally, into your own youth as much as possible, and remember that what made life difficult for you when you were young, is probably making things difficult for the younger generation.

So you should encourage the young to rebel against the other old persons who set up as authorities on life and living and give them encouragement not criticism. Then you should try and keep the capacity to laugh at yourself, for even the wisest people are slightly comic at times, and not to take oneself too seriously is a great help towards a happy life. And if death comes before you are so old and tired that you cannot recognise beauty, you should count yourself a happy man. It would be a grand end to a good old age.

ENTERTAINING IN WARTIME

ALTHOUGH we who are living in India are not faced with the hardships of war, as the household bills come in at the end of the month, there is a decided feeling of depression as one watches them steadily rising and with no corresponding rise in income to deal with them. Like Jane Austen's Sir Walter Elliot, we ask, "Is there any possible way of economising"? and like that amiable nitwit we come to the conclusion that there is not. And now that a sales tax has been added, the prospect is 'even blacker than before.

For however modest our own needs are, we *do* like to be able to entertain our friends, and entertaining, however simple, *does* make a difference to the household budget. For there is something about most human beings that makes them both wiser and wittier when they have had something to eat and drink. It may be a regrettable weakness, but even the most brilliant and entertaining of our friends is hardly at his best when he is hungry or thirsty. Most of us in a larger or lesser degree, "march on our stomachs" mentally as well as physically, and although you may have the appetite of a bird, if it is unsatisfied, it makes a world of difference. Besides, most of us like having our friends to eat and drink with us. It makes friendship a warm and heartening business to sit round the same table and break bread together, and when we are exiles it is very necessary that we should do it.

But breaking bread is not enough. There must be drink as well and although Dr. Johnson performed wonders as a guest, in the conversational line, with tea as his chief support, in this degenerate age, tea like patriotism "is not enough" for most of our friends. They need something alcoholic to break down their

self-consciousness and reserve. And the price of good drink goes steadily up and up, while housewives are left wondering how long they will be able to continue to provide it. Probably if this war goes on long enough, we shall find ourselves drinking water on every occasion, and although we may be the better for it in health, one cannot help but feel that perhaps we shall be all the duller for it.

It is useless to dwell on the fact that one whisky soda is equal in food value to six hard-boiled eggs, and that if you have drunk two, it is as if your internal plumbing has had no less than twelve hard-boiled eggs to deal with, a prospect that in cold blood is staggering. The fact remains that a whisky soda neither looks like, nor tastes like six hard-boiled eggs, neither does it have the same filling effect. Your plumper friends may look slightly uneasy as you tell them about it, but it goes no further even if they are trying to slim. They simply don't believe you and one can hardly blame them. It is difficult to believe it oneself. Science has let us down so often that when she places an uncomfortable fact before us, it is much pleasanter to think that she has made another mistake.

It is a pity in many ways that we do not retain the tastes of our youth. Most of us can remember when cocoa seemed very nectar to our childish stomachs. Drunk on a cold winter's night, how exquisite it tasted, made with lots of milk and flavoured with plenty of sugar! How one drained it to the last drop and gazed regretfully at the empty cup. But it is a drink that with age loses its charm for most of us. After adolescence there must be few people who can feel that delightful sense of being a success conversationally, with cocoa as their only stimulant. Nowadays, it seems to make one merely sleepy.

In England, coffee is still drunk at evening parties and people ask for nothing more, especially if you live in the country. You can ask your friends to come and

drink coffee with you after dinner or supper, and no-one thinks it at all odd. And the conversation does not seem to suffer in quality. For when you live in the country there is always something going on among your neighbours of real interest. The sins of the local council, how your neighbour's new mushroom house is doing, and how fortunate it was that the miller recovered his new false teeth from the mill dam when he laughed so heartily that they fell into it. Such matters of interest need little outside stimulant. They are enough in themselves.

But in the hot climate of India, coffee, although still the best drink in the world, drunk on the verandah in the early morning for breakfast while the world is still fresh, does not seem at all the right drink on a hot, still night.

Perhaps the best drink that acts as a delicate stimulant to most of us is wine. But it must be good and when drunk in moderation it uplifts the spirit and gives that delicious feeling of deep, deep wisdom that makes for happiness. But the war has taken wine out of most of our lives and even before, it was one of the sad things about England that we were no longer a wine drinking country. Our national drink, beer, is a buxom sort of drink and at the right moment can be well nigh perfect, but it is in no way a subtle drink. It is rather downright and filling and has the disadvantage of acting with many of us as both food and drink. It makes one sleepy rather than brilliant and ponderous rather than witty. On some occasions it is just right, for to feel sleepy can be excellent and it is just as well sometimes not to be too witty!

But alas for us all! If things go on as they are, we may find ourselves forced to do without these aids to social intercourse unless we are millionaires. There will arise a new technique in entertaining and it may not be a bad thing. We shall have to adopt the simpler standards that we have in England where people when

they are asked out, do not expect large quantities of alcohol. The tea tray will be brought in during the course of the evening and we shall all be the better for it. We shall perhaps not talk so much and may find ourselves playing simple games like "Rummy" "Vingt et Un", "Farmer's Glory" or even "Slippery Sam" if we are unable to grasp the intricacies of bridge. In short, our evening parties look like becoming very much the same as those Victorian ones described in E. F. Benson's "As we Were". Ladies will begin to have accomplishments again and entertain their fellows with a little music. The drawing room ballad will come into its own and songs about love and rosebuds in the hair will touch our hearts. Men will perhaps take to doing conjuring tricks or sing in a light tenor about an elusive "she". On the other hand we may all become inarticulate and sit listening to one wireless programme after another, but this is hardly likely. For wartime quickens in most of us an interest in what is going on, and there will always be those who are "agin the government" and insist on saying so.

This war looks like causing a revolutionary change in the lives of Europeans who live in India. The petrol rationing has already proved to the outside world that "burra sahibs" have legs, for can they not be seen pedalling manfully if a trifle stiffly, on bicycles to their offices? We may yet live to see them change from bringing financial rabbits out of hats during the day to producing real ones in the same way in the drawing room at night. It should add much to the gaiety of life in a somewhat drab world.

HOW LONG IS SHE STAYING?

WAR is very like marriage in one respect. No-one is quite the same after it as they were before. For war alters our habits, our thoughts

and often our morals. Sometimes the changes are an improvement, sometimes not, but there are few people left untouched by them. Particularly does war alter our social customs and behaviour for under the stress of war what we consider the normal mode of life has to stop.

Rationing, black-outs and air-raid warnings see to that. And one of the results of the new conditioning is that hospitality practically has to cease. No longer can we ask our friends to visit us and share a meal without thinking about it except on very rare occasions. Neither can we go and visit them in the same way. Each family becomes a self-contained unit living unto itself behind closed doors and thickly curtained windows. The Englishman's home is once again as in more primitive times, his castle.

This is a bad thing in many ways for human beings need the company of each other and the mental stimulation that comes from the play of mind upon mind. There are very few of us who would make good hermits. Even those people who need a great deal of solitude to be happy have moments when they like to mix with their fellow men even if it is only to reassure themselves that the world is not so stupid as they had begun to fear it was. Besides to most of us, our fellow beings prove interesting, however tedious they may be at times.

And if visiting our friends and having a meal with them has been cut down to the minimum, how much more has staying with them become a thing of the past? No longer can we hop into a car with a suit-case and have a pleasant week-end in someone else's house. No petrol and difficult railway travel have put an end to such joys. Besides everyone is so busy doing war-work and working long hours that if they have any leisure at the week-end, they need it for rest.

Perhaps before the war, this having visitors to stay in the house was a trifle overdone. There were

moments indeed, when hearing a car draw up outside and seeing an unexpected crowd arrive, one's heart sank. Especially when one lived in the country, for in England life is a busy affair for country dwellers, especially at week-ends. It was then one did the thousand and one things that seemed really important, like attending to the hedge that showed signs of tumbling into the next field or giving the garage a coat of creosote. If visitors were expected, it was another matter. Then one's mind tuned itself to a certain rhythm of behaviour. You made up your mind that you would do nothing except look after your visitors. There might be a certain itch at the back of your mind as you thought of things you would like to do, but you suppressed it. Visitors were coming and you were prepared to make their stay as happy as possible.

Perhaps people can be divided into two classes, those who like to get away from their own homes and those who like to stay in them and it would seem logical that the latter ought to make ideal visitors. But it doesn't always work out that way. Being an ideal visitor in someone else's house is a most difficult art. Being an ideal host is equally difficult.

It was a modern writer who gave this wise advice about the bringing up of children, "Love them and leave them alone". If you said about visitors, "like them, and leave them alone" you would be equally wise, but naturally you will choose your visitors carefully.

If you are the kind of person who likes to read and have intervals for conversation, never, never invite people to your house who follow you round. It is a maddening business. You settle them in a comfortable chair with an interesting book and disappear to do something essential, and before you can look round there they are, standing at your elbow. You send them out for a walk to enjoy the country air and in ten minutes they are back again, looking hopefully at

you to suggest something else. You get a book and settle down yourself. So do they, but insist on reading their book aloud to you. You feel murderous for your own book is so much more interesting than the one you are being forced to listen to. Besides if it is one of your own and it often is, you have already read it. When you have visitors like this you find yourself dodging them and standing in a secluded place just looking at the sky. It's more beautifully restful and empty, you decide than anything you have ever known.

When you are a visitor, unless you have chosen your hosts carefully life can be just as difficult for you. Your hosts may be the kindest soul alive and fond of you, but when they show it by never leaving you alone for a moment, it can be very wearing. If you think you will abstract yourself from them and let them be free of you for a short time, you may take a book and keep out of sight, but not for long. Someone will appear and say brightly, "Ah, there you are." "Yes", you say feebly. For it is difficult to deny that you are, so to speak, there.

Then follows a conversation on this or that. You keep your book open but then you find your eyes drifting to it so you close it and keep your finger in to mark the place. It is particularly hard for you always find your friends have one of the books that you have been aching to read and this is the first time you have had a chance to get hold of it. But it's no use. Your kind hostess will suggest a walk and unless you are one of the people who can say outright, "I don't want to walk and I do want to read", you are done for.

The ideal visitor is of course the one who melts imperceptibly into the normal life of the house where he is staying and the ideal host is the one who lets him. A good guest always gives the feeling that he is occupied so that his host never feels he must be looked after. When conversation is going, he is ready to join in and when there is a companionable silence, he never

feels he has to break it. Beyond the ordinary courtesies of life, he does not feel that he must earn his keep by being bright and entertaining his host at whatever cost.

The ideal host lets his guests enjoy themselves in their own way. If they want to sit and read or talk, he lets them, but if they are rumbustious fellows who must be hitting a ball of some kind, then he borrows a neighbour's family and lets them all run about until they drop. If he provides adequate refreshment for them, he can sit back and feel he has done his part.

Perhaps by the time this war is over we shall all have forgotten what it feels like either to be hosts or guests. Already you find people saying how little they go out and how little entertaining they are doing and if they know you well enough they will probably admit they rather like it, especially if they were popular as hosts and hardly ever had their house to themselves at week-ends. Another factor that is bringing home to people how very pleasant it was to have their houses to themselves is that so many of them are having either army men or evacuees billeted on them. And perpetual visitors in the house, however pleasant they may be are likely to make most people want to be by themselves again.

When one thinks how, before the war, visitors appeared unexpectedly and had to be accommodated on camp beds or divans in the drawing room, one realises how much war has changed our habits in this particular respect. Today, it seems as unlikely a happening as that Hitler should suddenly resign and say he is sorry for what he has done to the world.

In the meantime, we who can no longer be either hosts or guests have time to do well on our shortcomings in both respects. Were we the kind of guests who left our dressing gowns and tooth brushes behind us, so that our unfortunate hosts had to pack a parcel and send them on after us? Or were we dieting and made

everybody's life a misery because we could not eat this and that? On the other hand, were you the kind of host who fussed and fussed until everyone was on the point of screaming? Or did you arrange such a round of gaieties for your unfortunate guests that they staggered home, nervous wrecks?

Of course you may have been the ideal guest whose coming was a joy to look forward to and whose going was a sorrow, or the host with whom everyone wished they could stay forever. In either case, your activities are at an end as long as the war goes on. When it ends we shall have a chance once more of finding out, for visiting and being visited is too deeply ingrained in human beings for a war to eradicate it. Anyway, may you never be the guest of whom hosts whisper to each other in the privacy of their own room, "How long is she staying?" or the host whose guest says to himself. "Thank goodness, I'm going home tomorrow".

READING IN WARTIME

JUST as the war affects the food we eat so that we have to make changes on our menus, so it seems to effect a change in the books we like to read. In the case of food, we have to change because lots of the things we like to eat cannot be had. But that reason does not hold good where books are concerned. Despite a shortage of paper, there still seem to be as many books in the world as ever and authors seem to go on writing as usual. But in many cases their books do not satisfy as they did before. Perhaps it is because cleverness and mental agility much as they amuse and intrigue us in a peaceful world seem a little arid and hardly worthwhile in a wartime environment which is concerned with elemental things like life and death.

Of course, in wartime we all read newspapers greedily. But even the best of them are curiously unsatisfying these days. One reads the war news day after day until it comes to have a vague unreal quality as if the writers of it were writing from another planet. Probably this is due to the censorship, for however good a journalist is, by the time his writing has been handled and pruned by other people, it is bound to have lost the impress of his personality. It must be a heartbreaking job for a journalist who is keen on his work when expediency has to govern every word he writes, while the unsatisfied reader finishes up on the financial page trying to glean a few more scraps of world news from what is going on in the stock and share market and from some chairman's remarks at an annual general meeting.

For in wartime people develop a positive hunger for facts and information. Usually well-informed people realise the gaps in their knowledge while even people who are not normally interested in world affairs and who prefer their news in picture form are found reading leader writers and liking it. Like Rosa Dartle we all "want to know" and any book that will give us facts about the rest of the world we buy, beg or borrow. Light fiction does not seem nearly as exciting as a Hess descending from a parachute or Mr. Churchill stealing away to meet President Roosevelt and Marshal Stalin. While the readers of "They lived happily ever after" books find that with a war on, boy meets girl much more easily and frequently than in normal times and that romance and marriage become part of their own lives instead of having to be enjoyed vicariously through books.

Apart from newspapers the books that people read in wartime seem to fall into two categories. There are the books that satisfy people's desire for knowledge about diplomacy, history, economics, sociology, etc., and the other category in which the reader demands

books that provide an escape from this fantastic world that war has made. For a curious situation has arisen today. It is the present day world that is unreal to most of us and the world that we find pictured in certain books that spells reality to the majority of people. By far the greater number of books in this class might be called "nostalgic" books, where a world is described that existed before the war that seems a very haven of comfort and security compared with the world today. For human beings need happiness just as much as they need food and water if they are to live at all, and when normal life fails to provide it, they go back to books that tell them about a world that once had it.

Perhaps that is why the editor of a well-known weekly was reading Jane Austen when he was bombed out of his bathroom during an air-raid. For there is no doubt she is an ideal author to read when bombs are falling. Her world is so small, so ordered, and so full of the niceties of human behaviour that it is a positive refreshment to read about it. Her young ladies with their small accomplishments and their pre-occupation with getting a husband restore a sense of smallness to us who are finding the world a large unwieldy sprawling mass that insists on smothering our lives. We are reminded that we too, knew such a world once, not with such a conventional pattern maybe, but with standards of decency, dignity and kindness which in retrospect appear intensely valuable. There is too, something sublime in the way she ignores the war that was being waged between England and France when she was writing her books. And we cannot help but envy an age where war was considered the business of the professional soldier and sailor and barely touched the lives of ordinary people at all. It was regarded as an ill-mannered business that was best kept in the background.

Fanny Burney is another author whose books picture life that had an ordered pattern. To read as

in "Evelina" of a heroine who can say to the villain, "Good God, Sir! Would you undo me" when he takes her hand, restores in some queer way one's sense of proportion about this mad world.

Anthony Trollope in his "Barchester" novels reads very well in wartime. His parsons with their little intrigues, the bishops and the whole of life in a cathedral town in the Victorian age have a feather bed quality that is very soothing. Theirs was a world that seems best symbolised by a rich fruity port wine and it had a cosiness and stability that arouses wonder in us who have never known security since the last war. Even when his characters suffer oppression we know that everything will come right in the end and that justice will be done. Most of us need such a reassurance badly in a dictator ridden world.

Other books that one reads with satisfaction are books about English country life. How someone bought a derelict cottage or farm and made a thing of beauty and good living of it, or made a garden out of waste land. It is nature's way of restoring a balance in our lives, this need to read about something constructive. For with destruction a commonplace in our lives, we must have an antidote to enable us to hold on to things. Also deep rooted in most people of every nation is a desire to grow things and to live a country life. As we grow older, we all tend to go back to Mother Earth and to lose many of the frills of civilisation. And to those of us with memories of tiny villages in the country where the cottages appear to grow out of the soil, to read about them again reassures us that they exist still and that some day we may hope to enjoy them once again.

Poetry comes into its own again in a wartime world from which so much of the beauty has disappeared. But here again it is the older poets that satisfy us best. What Walter de la Mare calls, "Lovely naked poetry" one reads again and again and simplicity seems all

important. It is now that Shakespeare takes on a significance such as he has never had before to many of us while even a scrap like:—

Four ducks on a pond,
A grass bank beyond,
The blue sky of spring
White clouds on the wing.
What a little thing
To remember for years,
To remember with tears.

achieves a poignancy today that cleverer and more intricate poetry misses.

There is no doubt that we re-adjust our values in wartime including literary ones. We have to get down to essentials and our minds get stripped of a lot of useless lumber. The nearness of death heightens our sensitiveness to life and living regains much of its original simplicity. For as Sir William Temple wrote:— "When all is done, human life is at its greatest and best, but like a little forward child, that must be played with and humoured a little to keep it quiet until it falls asleep, and then the care is over."

FASHIONS IN WOMEN

IT is odd when you come to think of it, but there have been as many fashions in women as there have been in the clothes they wear. I suppose that the primitive man's "woman of the moment" was a large hefty girl whose utility value as a cook and a mother came high. Not for him a wise-cracking witty piece (for one thing the language didn't allow it) but one whose grunts when they did come, were full of

significance and pith and above all one who could do a good day's work with the best and give him sons as often as possible to help on the land. But as nothing was ever written on this subject, we can only surmise.

It was when books began to be written, however that men showed how much the subject of an ideal woman occupied their thoughts, for right through the ages they have waxed very vocal on the subject. Women have always been news it would seem. Even St. Paul who didn't seem to like them very much laid it down that "A woman's hair was her beauty, but a man's hair should be shorn" which shows that even though he disapproved of the creatures he at any rate had his own ideas as to what made a woman attractive. And he certainly made the important point that women should be as beautiful as possible. Luckily for women, men's standards of beauty have always been individual so that women who have not fitted in with the conventional fashion of the moment could always find some man who found them "all beauty and all delight".

The ancient Greeks, however, who were a logical nation did not expect too much from one woman. They married women who were conventionally beautiful and promptly relegated them to the home where they bore children and ran the house. But for conversational purposes they visited and talked to the witty and intelligent hetærae who were usually unmarried. While the Spartans trained their women and girls to be tough and athletic and to bear children for the service of the State. They were not asked to think, but to accept, and anything soft and feminine was utterly despised. Well, as M. Balieff of the *Chauve Souris* used to say "The Greeks and Spartans have been dead a long time" and their particular fashion in women went with them.

It was as life became easier that toughness in women became unfashionable. In mediaeval times women

stayed at home and what with spinning and weaving and making candles they had a busy time. But not so busy that they didn't have time to make themselves beautiful to look at. Tall women with long tresses were the fashion and they had to be on the plump side. And here is an interesting phenomenon. Until comparatively modern times, the admired beauty of any age was nearly always a large woman. Men did not ask for intelligence, and of course it was they who set the standard, but merely for physical charms, and in bulk! And one is bound to say that down to Edwardian times they got what they asked for. Those opulent bosoms and magnificent figures set off by large lustrous eyes we find beautiful even today when we see portraits of bygone beauties. And even Mr. Bernard Shaw's dictum that the most beautiful woman in the world looks just the same as any other woman after you have been married to her for a month doesn't always convince us that you would get tired of looking at a beautiful woman. One might get tired of living with her, perhaps, but that is another matter!

It was towards the end of the eighteenth century that the emphasis on beauty alone, in a woman with no wit to back it up as it were, began to weaken. It was a flowering time in the intelligence of the world and men began to get a little impatient with women who were just beautiful but dumb. Those determined women. "The Blues" dedicated themselves to showing that women need not be beautiful only, but could be worth talking to as well, and with few exceptions to a "Blue" they were all married. Even Fanny Burney, who was small and dumpy although she was over forty when it happened, got a husband, while Hannah More although she did not actually marry, got a settlement and an annuity from an elderly suitor whose courage faltered so that he could not be got "to name the day". Which was almost as good as getting a husband in those days! Not that men did not still look for beauty in their wives. The aristocracy of the time who were

busy collecting beautiful furniture for their equally beautiful houses collected a beautiful wife to go with them as a matter of course. But the intelligentsia among men had discovered that there was a certain amount of mental stimulation to be had from talking to a witty woman and so for the first time intelligence began to count as an asset to women.

Then came the Victorians and with them the pendulum swung back. Again the fine woman with the magnificent figure was the fashion of the time. There was an atmosphere of red plush and gold fringe about the whole age and Lord Byron's type of Oriental feminine beauty made popular by his poems was the fashionable ideal. Plumpness was required and small hands and feet, along with fine shoulders, large eyes and exceeding sensibility. No wonder Lady Caroline Lamb failed to hold Byron's fancy; For she followed the modern fashion in being slim and boyish and even her fine eyes couldn't make up for her lack of avoirdupois. While in sensibility, which was shown by a tendency to swoon and to cry easily she easily fell far behind much less attractive women. It was a difficult fashion to fulfil, but somehow women managed it and an intelligent woman did her best to hide the fact that she was not a ninny, otherwise the chances were that she ended up by being an old maid. Men, the cunning creatures, who imposed this ideal made quite a good thing out of it for they were enabled to add any property their wives had to their own until the Married Women's Property Act.

The Pre-Raphaelites in the "90's" tried hard to introduce a different fashion of feminine beauty in the English scene through their paintings and for a time English women could be seen, trailing round in long shapeless robes looking unhappily out at the world from behind a tangle of hair, their over-full white throats looking as swan-like as possible. But then came the bicycle and freedom. Blood stirred briskly

with exercise, legs became a fact you couldn't ignore, and almost overnight the fashion in women changed. Bustles wagged provocatively no longer and small women came into their own. With the Edwardians the type of prettiness made popular by Gaiety Girls and other actresses came, and that lasted until the war of 1914.

Then what a change! For the first time, the boyish type of woman came to be the fashion the world over. Gone were the opulent bosoms and the flowing tresses and women changed their shape with what seemed almost miraculous quickness. They slimmed and starved themselves to get the necessary fashionable angularity. They played the same games as men almost with ferocity and in every way demonstrated the freedom that the war had given them. But in the "30's" the pendulum swung back again and from the moment that Hitler came to power women reacted back to the soft feminine ideal. Long full frocks in the evening accentuated their femininity and they even started to wear stays that gave them small waists and curved hips. Until just before this last war curves in women were again the fashion as they had been in earlier days.

Now of course, most women are in uniform but when peace comes it is interesting to speculate on what the next fashion in women will be. That they will have to be intelligent goes without saying. More and more are men marrying women for their wit and wisdom than for mere physical charms. Not that women who are not good to look at are not as popular as ever. Men don't change much in that respect. But with the almost universal use of cosmetics even girls who are not beautiful or even pretty can look smart and piquant. And that allied with a pretty wit is as irresistible as beauty in modern times. Also size has become relatively unimportant.

But there is one straw which shows which way the wind is blowing. In America, owing to the world-

wide fact that nowadays women on the whole are living longer than men, women through inheritance are beginning to be large shareholders in most of the big companies there. In one case and there are probably others, one woman is even President of an important company because she is the largest shareholder through inheritance. Will the next fashion in women be the business woman? Already in America women count very much in the business world as executives. If they begin to count as shareholders as well, a new situation will arise. Perhaps for the first time a woman's attractiveness will depend on whether she holds preference or ordinary shares? It is an intriguing thought. But being a woman myself, I'm sure that women will still take an interest in looking well. My only fear is that a business uniform may arise. And the thought of women in the feminine equivalent of pin-striped trousers, black morning coat and a bowler hat as worn in the city of London is a trifle horrifying. But then again, there will always be one feminine rebel who will insist on wearing a red feather even on her bowler. Nature will see to that!

BURGLARS, SIR!

BURGLARY is like murder. It may happen in other people's lives, but you never think for one moment that it will happen to you. That is why, when I heard unwontedly loud voices the other morning in the house, I sleepily remarked on the noise the servants were making and that was all. It was only when an agitated bearer knocked on the door and bleated shrilly, "Thieves have been here, Sir" that I slowly took in what had happened, and even then, my

attitude was one of impersonal curiosity. It was only by degrees that I realised that was *my* silver cigarette box and *my* large pewter plates and dish that had been taken and by that time I had become accustomed to the thought that they were mine no longer.

It was a curious burglary. There had been some greenish yellow pears on the pewter dish which against the soft silver grey of the pewter I had thought, made a pleasant colour symphony. Whether the thieves thought so too, I shall never know, but they had carried the dish complete with pears on to the lawn outside, and presumably squatting under a guava tree had torn out the sandal wood lining of the cigarette box and laid it and the three pears tidily on the grass for all the world to see. A small enamel box containing powder and a puff they must have thought held jewels, but on finding out their mistake, they had very carefully put it back on the verandah steps where we found it next morning. This I thought showed a certain amount of thoughtful consideration. They might so easily have been annoyed and in their disappointment wantonly broken it. It was only when the police inspector arrived and on my mentioning that I couldn't understand why the thieves should have bothered to carry away pewter plates that were heavy and not worth melting down said, "Oh, they would think they were silver " that I realised how badly their consideration must have been repaid. For think of their disappointment! To feel that your night's haul consisted of six large silver plates and a large silver dish! To painstakingly and apprehensively lug them through a wet and stormy night, every nerve alert with the danger of being caught before you. To feel as you reached home, soaked to the skin, that at any rate you would be able to sit back for a bit and take things easily for a time and even maybe, taste the joys of an honest life. Then to find out that you had carried home nothing but a quantity of metal, four parts iron and one part lead! It must have been a bitter blow.

It must not be thought that I do not regard the behaviour of the thieves as highly anti-social. I do. But I cannot help also but consider a thief as being a person of arrested development. He is still at the stage of a small child who grabs everything he sees and it is unfortunate for the community that he has never got beyond this stage. For I cannot think that anyone is a burglar from choice. As a method of earning a living it seems to me to be one of the most exacting professions a man can take up. Think of turning out in the dead of the night, or worse still, in the early hours of the morning when Nature ordains that all her creatures shall sleep! Think of the nervous strain of forcing an entrance into a house that doesn't want you! Of taking one step at a time in the dark, waiting apprehensively for the slightest sound or for a dog to bark, or for some inconsiderate member of the household to choose just that moment to switch on the lights and get a drink of water! Perhaps with long practice a burglar's nerves get used to this state of tension, but to the ordinary persons the game seems hardly worth the candle. Then think how you must feel if you are a thief, every time you see a policeman walking towards you! To the ordinary honest citizen a policeman is usually a comforting sight and if he is a fat policeman, he carries a certain amount of reassurance that the world is an orderly and peaceful place. One feels that there is a certain amount of law and order in the world in spite of all the rumours to the contrary. As a taxpayer, he is a sign that you are getting something for your money. "They" are not frittering it away. But if you are a thief you can have no such comforting feelings even if you are paying your taxes like any ordinary man. If he makes a move in your direction how you must quake, and what it must take out of you in nervous strain not to run like a hare in the opposite direction! If he bids you "Good morning" you must wonder what it forebodes while if he goes on to say "Very wet last night" your nerves must be in

a state of frenzy as you wonder how much he knows. Honesty would seem not only the best policy, but the most restful one, and in a restless world like the present one is not to be despised.

It is not that I do not regret my pewter plates, my dish and my silver cigarette box. They were all lovely to look at and when they belonged to me they added much to my pleasure. But perhaps one outgrows possessions except in rare cases. And to tell the truth one gets a certain amount of pleasure in the fact that one's losses were not greater. There are my two Sung bowls for instance and some of my first editions. True they are in England but I might have had them with me and one gets a great deal of comfort out of the thought that they have been left behind. Probably it is the war too that makes even the most treasured possessions lose their importance. For so many people have lost everything they possess that material things lose their importance. Life these days seems more precious than anything else, for in spite of the cruelty and pain that has been let loose in the world and the anger and indignation that we feel over the stupidity of war, unless one is ill, it is impossible not to feel glad that one is still alive.

We all keep a lot of the child in us and as we outgrow tops and marbles and dolls, we replace them with other things, toys of our adult stage. But they are but toys after all and when they are stolen from us, we realise how relatively unimportant they all are. I always like the story of a friend's great uncle who loved his comfort above everything else which seems to me an admirable example of how to take the advent of burglars. He had gone to bed and was wakened up by various sounds of excitement in the house. Very annoyed at being wakened up, he went to the head of the stairs and enquired what was the matter from the servants who were all clustered in the hall. "Burglars, Sir" said one of them.

"What a time of the night to come"! puffed the great uncle indignantly and straightway went back to bed, refusing to discuss the matter at all! This was perhaps taking burglars in the grand manner and shows poise that many of us might envy. It also shows a lack of the possessive spirit that we cannot help but admire. And above all, it shows that true appreciation of sleep that is the mark of the wise man. Perhaps that is the only good thing to be said about burglars. They do their very best not to waken you up.

If this were fiction and not fact, the burglar would read this essay and I should waken one morning to find my stolen things on their verandah. But I'm afraid that charming miracles like that do not happen. Yet I should have liked the thief to know that I recognise his disappointment that the plates were not silver. Only as I am but human, silver plates would have seemed to me as beautiful as they would to him and as they were mine, I should feel he had no right to them. But a tiny point puzzles me. Why didn't the thieves eat the pears? They were just ripe and very delicious!

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